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Espiritista-as-Woman, Woman-as-Mother: The Gendering of Practice in *Espiritismo Cruzado*

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis has been composed solely by myself and that no part of it has been submitted in any previous application for a degree. Except where I state otherwise by reference or acknowledgement, the work presented here is entirely my own.

Signature:

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February 2019
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Pa' los muertos

Abstract

Based on 18 months of ethnographic fieldwork in Habana, this thesis examines *Espiritismo Cruzado,* an African diaspora religious tradition enmeshed in the wider matrix of Cuban religiosity of African origin, or as my interlocutors call it, *la religión.* The practice is rooted in spirit mediation and is concerned with managing daily life via relationships with spirits of the dead (*muertos*). The religious traditions in *la religión* are highly gendered; *Espiritismo Cruzado* is generally associated with women and femininity. *Espiritismo Cruzado* is gendered in relation to the other practices in the matrix. This thesis shows what such gendering tells us about navigating religiosity and sheds light on practitioners' relationships with historical imaginaries that contribute to identities surrounding Cubanness.

This thesis draws broadly from literature on the anthropology of gender, sexuality and the anthropology of religion. I pay special attention to the anthropology of 'Afro-Cuban' religion and Latin American, Caribbean and Cuban examinations of gender and sexuality. My thesis intervenes as a close-grained ethnographic exploration of *Espiritismo Cruzado*, taking seriously both the spirit and practitioner relationships located in a socio-historic context and my interlocutors' practical concerns of getting by. As compared to work on other traditions in *la religión, Espiritismo Cruzado* is less explored. Works that engage questions of African diaspora religious traditions and gender, sexuality, and race often emphasise the fluidity of these categories. This thesis also addresses how practices might solidify them. Further, while understanding dynamics of self or person are important, my interlocutors' concerns highlighted topics like the precarity of their financial situations, relationships and family troubles, and insecurities about beauty or sexuality, all of which were underlined by wider issues of race and gender.
I propose that ideas of woman-as-mother and what I characterise as acts of mothering play a key role *Espiritismo Cruzado*, contributing to the

practice's gendering as feminine. This thesis highlights the way that spirit and practitioner relationships generate tensions surrounding sexuality and gender via uses of the body. I argue this is due to an analogy between women's reproductive and procreative capacities and their spiritual and creative capabilities. I suggest that knowledge production in *Espiritismo Cruzado* is heavily centred around feeling-as-knowing. Practitioners' emotional states are regarded as indicative of authoritative knowledge coming from spirits. My thesis offers insight into how spirits influence the ways people engage gendered and racialised lived realities.

My thesis illuminates how creative, embodied knowledge production through modes like trance and sensitivity informs economic precarity, race, sexuality and gender. I focus on communal dynamics that open up space for the continuous cultivation of practitioners' spirituality. I emphasise *resolver*— dealing with every day, pragmatic concerns—as at the forefront of *Espiritismo Cruzado*. I show how through *Espiritismo Cruzado* practice and *resolver*, certain norms regarding broader understandings of racial imaginaries and gender and sexuality are productively challenged and sometimes reinforced. I ask what interconnected gendering and racializing means for women's lived experience but also consider how men navigate their religiosity in relation to *Espiritismo Cruzado*'s gendered codings. Given that some technologies of spiritual communication are relegated to the feminine, the thesis details how practitioners negotiate femininity and masculinity, paying close attention to how this is different for women, the majority of practitioners, and men, the minority.

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Glossary

aguardiente: strong sugarcane liquor; literally 'firewater'

Babalawos: practitioners of *Ifá;* While Spanish does not capitalise proper nouns, as the thesis is written in English, when utilising Spanish words, I have followed English conventions— *Babalawos, Congo*, *Espiritismo Cruzado*, etc.

***bóveda*:** spiritual altars relevant to *Espiritismo Cruzado* practice

bozal: broken Spanish spoken by enslaved Africans

brujería: witchcraft

caballo: spirits of the dead refer to the practitioners who work with them as '*caballos*'; literally 'horse'; I am aware of the problematics of taking the masculine as a neutral. However, I have followed the ethnographic language my interlocutors used.

***cajón*:** literally drawer; refers drumming activities held for *muertos* and the wooden block instruments used in these activities

caldero: see *nganga*

***camino**:* a person's unique spiritual path

caridad: spirits' messages or communications; literally 'charity'

***cascarilla*:** a chalk-like substance made mostly of eggshell

***claridad*:** spiritual intuition; literally 'clarity'

Congo: spirits of enslaved Africans; sometimes referred to as *Negro Africano* (Black African spirits); *Congas* are often called Francisca, while *Congos* are often called José; coded as masculine regardless of the individual *muerto*'s gender

conocimiento: spiritual knowledge

criollo: creole; synonymous with Cuban

***cuadro espiritual*:** a diverse group of *muertos* who act in your favour; literally 'spiritual picture'

desarrollar: ongoing process of spiritual development

despojar: cleanse

don: gift; innate spiritual capacity that allows for a person to practice *Espiritismo Cruzado*

escuelita**:** the weekly informal meetings dedicated to spiritual development

Espiritismo Cruzado**:** a religious tradition centred around spirit mediation

espiritista**:** practitioner of *Espiritismo Cruzado*

facultades*:* spiritual capabilities or competencies

fundamento: see *nganga*

gitana: gypsy spirit, coded as hyperfeminine

hacerse Santo: to be initiated in *Santo/Ocha*

Ifá: heteromasculine divination cult

inventar: see *resolver*

jícara: hollowed out half coconut shell used as a drinking receptacle

luchar: see *resolver*

luz: said to confirm another practitioner or spirit's comment during an *escuelita;* literally 'light'

montarse/ passing muertos: falling into trance

mpungo: deities relevant to *Palo* (syncretised with *orichas* and Catholic saints)

muertos: spirits of the dead

muerto principal: primary/principal spirit

Nganga**:** composite objects of bones, metals, and sticks relevant to *Palo* practice

oricha/santo: deities relevant to *Santo/Ocha* (syncretised with *mpungos* and Catholic saints)

palangana: basin filled with a mixture of aguardiente, *cascarilla* (a chalk-like substance of eggshells), flower petals, water and perfume.

Palo: Kongo-Bantú derived religious tradition

palero/ngangulero: practitioner of *Palo*

prenda espiritual*:* similar to the *prendas* of *Palo* practice but without human bones

prenda material: see *nganga*

presentation: manifestation of *muertos*' communication

prueba: proof, provides evidence of religiosity

rayamientos: the relevant ritual cuttings for *Palo* initiation

rayada: to be initiated in *Palo*

la religión: the ethnographic term my interlocutors used to refer to the relevant matrix of Cuban religiosity of African origin

religioso: general name for practitioners of Cuban religious traditions of African origin

resolver: hustling; references the day-to-day struggle

Santo/ Ocha: Yoruban-Lucmuí derived religious tradition

santero: practitioner of *Santo*

tendencias*:* tendencies towards, or affinities to; signifies a harmonious convergence of different categories of spirits and their energies

vista: spiritual sight

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Introduction

Odalis placed a vase of flowers on the table alongside another with basil. The room filled with a fresh scent as sunlight shone through the window. We sat down and began our work with *muertos* (spirits of the dead). We passed cigars around the circle. I took one and handed the rest down. I bit off the tip of the cigar and waited for the pack of matches to circulate but the woman to my left held out a lit match so I could lean in and light mine with the same flame.

Odalis said that she felt the current of a *gitana* (gypsy spirit). She recognised the *gitana* as her sister Ines' spirit. Ines confirmed that she felt it too and the *muerta* was indeed hers. We sang for a bit. After one song Ines said she felt dizzy. She was not stating it as a complaint, so much as sharing it with the group as an indication of something more, something to come. Indeed, she soon fell into trance. The *gitana* arrived cackling. She rolled her body, shaking and shimmying rhythmically. The spirit was pleased to hear that there were plans to hold a drumming activity. She asked that we pass around a plate of honey. We fulfilled her request. Each of us dipped a finger in the sticky pool to 'sweeten' our lives. The *gitana* did not stay very long and soon Ines fell out of trance.

After some time, Lydia, a good friend of the family and ritual kin in another religious tradition, shared. Lydia noted that María, Ines' four-year-old granddaughter, has strong *vista* (spiritual sight). She turned to Claudia, María's mother and Ines' daughter. She told Claudia to be careful as María is precocious and will talk to anyone. 'Be careful. She needs *ojitos de Santa Lucia*.' Odalis said she had *ojitos de Santa Lucia*, a necklace with a small amber shell that protects and guards against jealousy, from when her children were small and would gift it to Claudia. Odalis thought a moment and said to me, 'Aly, let me see if I can get another for you, because you are out working with different *religiosos* [general name for practitioners of Cuban religious traditions of African

origin], some who we do not know. Using that will ensure you do not end up with those who you cannot trust.' I nodded. 'But yes, María should wear the *ojos de Santa Lucia*,' Odalis confirmed.

Lydia noted, looking to Odalis, 'the spirit who administers to me is telling me that there is a strong relationship between you and the girl [María].'

Knowing this to be true, that Odalis and her grandniece were close, I granted light to her spirits. '*Luz*,' I said softly.

Ines and Odalis' cousin teased me, 'Look at Aly, she is in this! She knows all the words to the songs! You are in this! You are attending activities and events all over. When are you going to initiate into *Santo* [another Cuban religious tradition]?' she joked.

We went on singing several more songs. Ines' younger, teenage daughter was also present. Her attendance in work with *muertos* was a rarity in my fieldwork. Lydia told her that she needed to open her mind and internalise these religious traditions. 'You were born to this family and you need to respect this. This is not a game,' she said. Ines' younger daughter shrugged. Lydia continued on, 'I see a *Congo*. He is strong and bare-chested, and he is wearing sack shorts and a red handkerchief. He is holding a machete.' Lydia's words highlighted the coding of *Congo* spirits as (hyper)masculine.

Then, suddenly, Odalis fell into trance. The *Congo* greeted us: 'Good morning, good afternoon, goodnight.'
'Good afternoon,' we replied.

'Francisco before you.'

'Welcome Francisco,' we said in unison.

After these routine niceties, Francisco said he was happy to be there, and he too was pleased that his *caballo* (Odalis; literally 'horse') was working toward saving up money for a drumming activity soon. He asked for *aguardiente* (strong sugarcane liquor; literally 'firewater') and a handkerchief to wear on his head. Once he was given what he requested, Francisco turned to Ines' younger daughter and became aggressive. 'You need to respect your mother! You cannot be out at all hours of the day and night!' He said this roughly, repeatedly slapping his chest hard. He shouted at her to listen to her mother. Ines' daughter remained quiet but now with a sheepish look on her face. Francisco went around imparting smaller pieces of advice and addressing some other concerns.

After he had done this, just as he came, he went. When Odalis fell out of trance, she was hoarse from shouting. She held her chest and said Francisco left her with tachycardia. She splashed herself with perfume and water. She rubbed her joints, complaining that he had aggravated her sore shoulder. I scolded Odalis, 'You have to go to the doctor! You are managing everything and taking care of everyone, but you need to take care of your health!' Odalis acknowledged that I was right, but I did not feel assured she would actually follow through.

Soon, Lydia fell into trance with her *Conga*. Lydia's *Conga*, Francisca, was very physical and spoke with her whole body. She was funny and made several over the top comments which we all laughed at. Though a woman, Francisca as a *Conga* performed masculine affectations. She shouted, aggressively puffed on tobacco, and when seated had a distinct posture: legs spread wide, arms bent, elbows up, and hands resting on knees. She rose and went around the circle cleansing us with *aguardiente*, flowers and *cascarilla* (a chalk-like substance made mostly of eggshell). We passed around a *jícara* (hollowed out half coconut shell) full of *aguardiente*. María was sat on my lap and wanted to drink and work with the *aguardiente* as well. Just as we did with the honey, I let her dip her pinkie in the *jícara*. After she tasted a drop, she said excitedly, 'It burns!' and softly kicked her ankles back onto my shins, giggling with glee.

Francisca offered various pieces of advice and warnings to us. When she came to me, she clasped my hands tightly; her grip was strong. She violently yanked on both of my arms and pulled my whole body down toward the floor. She lifted me back up on to my feet, then twirled me several times in each direction. I felt completely out of control of my body. When Francisca approached Odalis, Odalis told her, 'Careful with my arm, another *Negro Africano* [Black African spirit] was just here and he did a number on it!' We all laughed.

Francisca laughed too, but she also said, 'Your Francisco, your *muerto principal* [primary/principal spirit], is helping you, offering you blessings! You will take the blessings you are given! And you will also take what I have come to give you!'

Odalis responded, 'Yes, yes *noble ser* [noble being], that is fine, but really,' she repeated, 'be careful with my shoulder!' All of us, living and dead, laughed again.

This sunny Saturday afternoon practicing *Espiritismo Cruzado* in the municipality of Diez de Octubre in La Habana, Cuba was representative of most of my fieldwork. *Espiritismo Cruzado,* the focus of this thesis, is a religious tradition centred around spirit mediation that makes up part of a complex milieu of Cuban religiosity of African origin, or *la religión.*[1] *Espiritismo Cruzado* is fundamentally concerned with managing daily life via relationships with *muertos*, spirits of the dead.

The introductory vignette above brings together the central themes of this project: collaborative, embodied knowledge production; trance and the shared body; and how *Espiritismo Cruzado* parallels and overlaps with

[1] The ethnographic term my interlocutors used to refer to the relevant matrix of Cuban religiosity of African origin.

processes of mothering. While the first two points may seem self-evident, this vignette illustrates that, as in processes of procreation and motherhood, *espiritistas* engage their bodies for particular purposes with specific motivations. As I will show throughout the thesis, work with *muertos*—like mothering—entails dynamics of hard work, tough love and nurturance. Motherhood is directly paralleled through trance. In trance, like pregnancy, *espiritistas* share bodies. Trance as a mode of communication with spirits and a methodology of knowledge production demonstrates the problematics of taking (bodily) autonomy as a privileged state. In sharing bodies, and blurring the notions of agent and patient, authority is diffused amongst different actors, practitioners and spirits alike.

I argue that *la religión*, and *Espiritismo Cruzado* in particular, uniquely condenses dynamics of Cuban history through processes of mixture and innovation. I demonstrate that *Espiritismo Cruzado* must be located within the matrix of *la religión* as it is always in dialogue with other relevant religious traditions. In particular, some of *Espiritismo Cruzado*'s gendered codings are illuminated in its relationships with other practices. I highlight, however, that questions of access also factor into *Espiritismo Cruzado*'s feminine codings. Practice is predicated on an innate gift that I intimate parallels pregnancy. Yet, this gift needs to be actualised through lifelong processes of spiritual development. I suggest this development is analogous to contextual, collaborative processes of mothering.

I further demonstrate that communal modes of embodied and emotional knowledge production carry feminine associations which fortify the practice's feminine associations. One methodology of knowledge production that is especially feminising is trance. In the thesis I show how relationships with spirits and their technologies of communication impact the lived experiences of practitioners. While the impact is generally for improvement, *muertos* help *espiritistas resolver,* (make ends meet, literally 'resolve') there are also strains and worries. I suggest that such

reservations and uncertainties reflect wider issues of navigating gendered and racialised norms. The thesis points to how racialised and gendered positionings of practitioners, religious traditions, and *muertos* are fluid and flexible but also at times static and confining.

I avoid a literal translation of *Espiritismo Cruzado* to 'Crossed Spiritism,' as I feel English obscures its complexity. While *Espiritismo Cruzado* is a practice in its own right, it takes on components of other Cuban religious traditions. The religious traditions that come together in *Espiritismo Cruzado,* however, are not 'crossed.' They are not confused, discrete or overlapping. Instead, they are mixed, constantly in flux, with variances and harmonious convergences. Because *Espiritismo Cruzado* practice is rooted in, and further fosters, ambiguity and adaptability, it is very much like Cubanness.

'*Cruzado'* may seem like an impractical qualifier in the Cuban context as everything is 'mixed.' The country's history and pride are in fact rooted in its amalgamated identity, defined through the phenomena of creolisation. The nation is popularly equated to *ajiaco*, a Cuban stew that includes everything on hand. I utilise '*Cruzado'* precisely in order to gesture to this variant of *Espiritismo*'s Cubanness. While *Espiritismo Cruzado* does not directly trace its lineage to African contexts in the same way as other practices, such as *Palo* (Kongo-Bantú) or the more widely known *Santo/Ocha* (Yoruban-Lucmuí), it is enmeshed in the wider environment of *la religión.*

Muertos are the foundation of all practices in *la religión*. As such, *Espiritismo Cruzado* is often overtly, occasionally subtly, interwoven with other religious traditions. *Muertos* are one of several different categories of spirits relevant to *la religión*. For the purposes of this thesis I sometimes, following my interlocutors, use 'spirit' as a synonym for *muerto*. However, I also expand on different categories of spirits as their relevance arises.

Muertos are the first actors who guide *religiosos* on their path, elucidating whichever practices are relevant to individual spiritual trajectories. *Muertos* do not only advise practitioners about initiating into (other) religious traditions in the matrix, their permission is required for ritual initiations; no actions can be undertaken without their consent. In addition to their central role in *Espiritismo Cruzado*, *muertos* are one of the most important categories of spirit in *Palo*. They contribute to all of *paleros*' ritual actions with the practice's relevant spiritual assemblages.

In practices of Yoruban derived religiosity, especially the religious tradition of *Ocha/Santo*, it is said that '*muertos paren los santos'* ('the dead give birth to the *santos/orichas'* [saint-like deities relevant to the practice*]*). This expression refers to the fact that prior to any ritual undertakings, *muertos* need to be consulted first and foremost.[2] Sometimes this consultation is merely nominal, but it remains essential. The phrase also indicates that *orichas,* mostly divinised ancestors, were once alive and died just like *muertos*. Further, this saying explicitly references reproduction, and life giving in particular, as a capacity that the dead hold. Again, because *muertos* are the foundation of all practices in *la religión*, *Espiritismo Cruzado* has a unique vantage point within the matrix for exploring questions of race, gender, and Cubanness.

Importantly, as the opening vignette shows, most—though not all—*espiritistas* (practitioners of *Espiritismo Cruzado*) are women. These demographics underwrite the practice's strong feminine coding in wider cultural imaginaries. This thesis examines what processes of gendering and interconnected racializing mean, especially for women's lived experience but also for how men navigate their religiosity in relation to practices' gendered codings. I found dichotomous codings of feminine and masculine were salient and widespread in the minutia of Cuban daily

[2] Some of these traditions acknowledge the importance of *muertos* more [*Santo*] than others [*Ifá]*).

life. From the feminine nation-state to the masculine revolution, or the religious traditions of the supposedly feminine *Espiritismo Cruzado* to the apparently masculine *Palo,* gendered associations appeared to be everywhere. Even in the opening vignette, the sweet honey linked with the *gitana* spirit is coded feminine while the strong *aguardiente* associated with the *Congo* spirits (both Francisco and Francisca) is read masculine. These associations indicate that Cuban life is saturated with logics of gender, often as binaries. But the logics or binary codings relevant to *la religión* do not always straightforwardly map onto broader Cuban understandings of gender, for example both Francisco *and* Francisca being coded masculine. I observed the creative tensions of gendered codings were also always in conversation with particular racialised imaginaries—more or less mixed, Blacker, lighter etc.

In addition to presenting the context of religiosity*, Espiritismo Cruzado* practice's codings, and relevant thematics, the vignette perhaps most importantly presents important interlocutors: Odalis, Ines, Claudia, María and Lydia, all of whom come up at other points in the thesis. The vignette illustrates particular interpersonal dynamics that are relevant to the broader arguments of this thesis. In this group of women, most of whom are related, there is a kind of mothering at play. Through cooperative action, we are taking care of each other. As a religious tradition, *Espiritismo Cruzado* cultivates an environment of intimacy and warmth but also as-needed scolding or occasional teasing. Mothering as an action is diffuse: Odalis confirms suggestions regarding María. Practitioners hold each other accountable to themselves: I playfully scold Odalis for not going to the doctor.

The importance of mothers as respected authorities is presented and related to (and through) practice: children are told off for being disrespectful and not accepting *la religión*, namely *Espiritismo Cruzado*. The coming together of several different women highlights the practice as something that must be done communally. Practitioners work together,

building off one another to engage with *muertos* and understand their communications more fully. Evidenced even in something as simple as cigars lit on the same flame, *Espiritismo Cruzado* is practiced in conjunction with a wider group, something I assert to be particularly meaningful given the demographics of my interlocutors: primarily Black and some *Mulata* women. Additionally, this example shows how *muertos,* who are a part of daily routines, are imbricated with *espiritistas* in reciprocal, active relationships. Further, the vignette illustrates that the participants involved span across multiple generations and because *Espiritismo Cruzado* begins young, they range in age.

At only four years old, María's spiritual sight was evident to her elders. There are numerous other methodologies through which communications with *muertos* are made possible. From simply feeling dizzy to full-blown trance, *espiritistas* work with *muertos* in different ways and across different scales of experience. Trance, dreams, sight, and *claridad* (intuition) are among the most common. All of these means of communication were described to me as rooted in feeling. For *espiritistas,* feelings come from an inner knowledge *muertos* provide, which gives them the ability to make valid inferences about the world around them. However, for novice *espiritistas*, until the *caridades* (spirits' messages or communications) are confirmed through *prueba* (practical proof) there is no way to establish spirits as the sources of the feeling, whether those feelings are somatic, emotional, or more commonly a combination of both. As opposed to positivistic notions that assert emotionality as beyond empirical testing, *prueba* allows for one's spiritual capacities to be recognised through evidence. *Caridades* are confirmed in daily life and lived experience. *Conocimiento* (knowledge), rather than abstract belief, is the most relevant expression of this religiosity. Rather than believing in *muertos*, *espiritistas* know them.

The example above also highlights the mutability of several different religious traditions that make up *la religión*. As we practiced *Espiritismo*

Cruzado, we were inevitably and necessarily in dialogue with other practices. The namesake of the necklace recommended to both María and myself is Santa Lucia, a Catholic saint. There were jokes about my adeptness in *la religión* leading me to initiate in *Ocha*. And two of the *muertos* (Francisco and Francisca) were *Negros Africanos*, or *Congos*, intimating that they were practitioners of *Palo* in life. Flexibility including and beyond religious traditions is always at play. Bodies, genders, various states of being (living and/or dead) are all fluid. My initial discussion of *Espiritismo Cruzado*, its mutability, and the specifics of practice sets up the broader questions that this project engages.

Research Questions

'Women are more mystical, they have this advantage because of the part they play in creation. This is just a fact, and this helps them move forward and advance in spiritual development. They are better suited for *Espiritismo [Cruzado]*.'

While discussing spiritual development, the ongoing process of cultivating one's spiritual capacity, a *religioso* offered me the above explanation for why more women practice *Espiritismo Cruzado* than men. His answer boils down to bodily, procreative capacities. Following this practitioner's reasoning, and as reflected in the thesis' title, '*Espiritista*-as-Woman, Woman-as-Mother,' this project asks (1) why for many Cubans is there an apparent conflation between *espiritistas* and women, and relatedly between women and mothers? I seek to understand (2) how Cuban concepts of race and gender shape these conflations. And, (3) how do these conceptions and conflations map onto *la lucha,* the day-to-day hustle of getting by?

This *religioso's* explanation stated that women had a supposed spiritual superiority stemming from their reproductive faculties. Comments like these regarding links between women and the spiritual were not unique to men or *religiosos* who did not practice *Espiritismo Cruzado.* While this comment was made by a male *palero*, others—men and women alike,

including *espiritistas*— associated women with that which yields spiritual power in *Espiritismo Cruzado* practice. This *palero*'s words most concisely crystalize how many interlocutors understood the fact that more *espiritistas* are women than men as at once due to the concept of a 'natural gift,' or *don*, that relates to spirits and, relatedly, to women's perceived unique, intrinsic openness. When I asked the same *religioso* to elaborate on why he thought women are better suited for *Espiritismo Cruzado*, he replied simply '*Sambia* [the supreme, creating deity in *Palo*] made it this way.'

This quotation provides a useful entry point. It articulates, as did many of my interlocutors, both women and men, that in being 'more mystical,' taken in this context as being synonymous with spiritual, women were somehow 'better' at *Espiritismo Cruzado*. Further, the *palero's* comment that women are better suited for *Espiritismo Cruzado* highlights the gendering of practices. This practitioner provides a conceptualisation of femininity that relates inherent spiritual/religious *facultades* (competencies and capabilities) to embodied procreative capacities (penetration and conception, gestation, nursing, nurturing etc.). Popular ideas about femininity (and masculinity) in Cuba more generally, are complexly mapped onto religious practices, typifying their gendered codings.

For my interlocutors, gender demonstrates its relevance as a complementary and binary balance of energies, as relational difference. The majority of my interlocutors read bodies' genitalia as mapping onto gender. For most, a body with a vagina is a woman's body, and likewise, a body with a penis is a man's body. Because they are ethnographically salient, there are times in which I refer to people as 'male' or 'female.' I clarify that gendered or sexed categories of person are not clear-cut or bounded. Still, in my experience people were sexed as male or female from birth. This is similar to frameworks of gender as the mapping of

cultural constructions onto prediscursively, naturally sexed bodies (Levi Strauss 1971 [1949]).

Despite being understood as natural and fairly straightforward categories for the religious practitioners I worked with, these identities of male, man, and masculine and female, woman, or feminine also had to be lived up to and performed appropriately.
When people do not live up to these constructions, rumours (or at the very least jokes) about homosexuality often arise. I observed this to be the case for men especially. Ethnographically, gender difference was at the forefront of marking people and things. Yet the thesis' foregrounding of gender does not elide the importance of contextual engagements with class and race, which my interlocutors discussed less but remain important to understanding their lived realities. The ethnographic centring of gender is not meant to discount the ways identities and subjectivities are formed via multiple axes, nor to make an ontological claim that prioritises gender as a privileged mode of difference.

While there exists a minority of *Espiritismo Cruzado* practitioners that are men, there is an interesting characterisation of femininity at play. I often found that as women were reduced to their embodied, maternal, reproductive abilities, these aptitudes were also valorised and cited as a privileged source for action in *Espiritismo Cruzado.* While the thesis often discusses the gendered nature of practices, I demonstrate how the processes of gendering and racializing are inextricably linked, though certainly not conflated. In addressing gendered codings, I illustrate how norms regarding gender, race, and sexuality are embodied, and at once undercut and reproduced. I argue that beyond women outnumbering men in *Espiritismo Cruzado* practice, *Espiritismo Cruzado* is gendered through its modes of communication with *muertos* (trance, intuition) and a complex web of popular cultural imaginaries. The cultural imaginaries include ideas surrounding who women are, who men are, what these categories of persons can/should do, and historical archetypes that relate

to wider gendered and racialised codings. Having laid out *Espiritismo Cruzado*, explored some of the practice's intricacies, and introduced how its relevant codings are configured and experienced, below I briefly locate this research in relation to other relevant examinations of *la religión* and Cuba, both historically and contemporarily.

Situating the Thesis

In practicing *la religión*, I observed my interlocutors identifying with and renegotiating tropes relevant to Cuba's cultural imaginaries, especially racialised stereotypes. These stereotypes are linked to the trajectory of Cuban anthropology. Fernando Ortiz, considered the 'father' of Cuban anthropology, was one of the first to examine Cuban religiosity as a unique phenomenon. While there are numerous works on the wider matrix of *la religión*, special mention is due to Ortiz. His scholarship (see especially 1986 [1906], 1986[1916]) contributes to the landscape of religiosity and this project. His early research in criminology was constitutive of some of the problematic and reductive conceptualisations of race, Blackness and *la religión* that practitioners confront. He pejoratively categorised *la religión* as *brujería*. Later (1940a, 1987 [1940b]) Ortiz's career trajectory shifted to more romanticised depictions of *la religión* that equally influence my interlocutors' ideas and are actively traversed in their daily lives. Ortiz laid the foundation for conceptualising Africanness as an inherent, and actually valuable, part of Cubanness. This idea is seen in my interlocutors' understandings of themselves as Cubans, particularly in relation to their history, ancestry, religiosity and sense of selves. The thesis demonstrates the Cubanness/creole-ness of *la religión* alongside African origins.

The majority of my interlocutors are Black women.[3] I pay attention to their narratives and consider their unique experiences. Lydia Cabrera, who was

[3] I do not argue Blackness—or any racial category— as a natural, bodily essence; but rather that historical processes marked certain bodies as

among the first researchers to examine specific practices of the matrix rather than making claims about a monolithic 'religion' or *brujería* (witchcraft), also emphasised the role of Black women as practitioners of *la religión*. Among the first Cuban researchers to conduct fieldwork and employ participant observation as a methodology, Cabrera's work highlights how *religiosos* relate to *Espiritismo Cruzado* in direct conversation with 'cults' of African origin (2000 [1954]). I too observed this dynamic religiosity without any kind of dilution or weakening of religious traditions. Cabrera elucidated *religiosos'* claims that *Espiritismo Cruzado* is not a new practice, but rather that—if framed in terms of the living having particular relationships with *muertos*—the practice can be traced back prior to enslavement, as is the case with other practices. Cabrera's work often leans into poetic incongruence and flexibility as she takes Cubanisms on their own terms (1940).

Taking Cubanisms on their own terms is part of an effort to appropriately contextualise research. Contextualisation is relevant throughout the thesis. This relevance is especially evident in chapters one and two as they set the scene of Cubanness and *la religión* as distinctly mixed, creole phenomena. I demonstrate how *la religión* directly speaks to Cuban history. In particular, my project frames categories of *muertos* as akin to historical archetypes. Their active, engaged presence in the lives of practitioners signals not only to a relevant history, but a blurring of then/now. Blurring boundaries between religious traditions and emphasising the importance of historicising are also evident in Palmié's research (2002, 2006a, 2006b, 2013). He approaches practices as necessarily hybrid and synergistic and emphasises how delineations between them are inherently unstable.

Black and that people continue to actively interpret their relationship to such markings. Nor do I argue for monoliths of Black or Cuban femininity. Rather than truth claims, all of my arguments are ethnographic and based on the lived experiences of my interlocutors as either they shared them with me or as I observed and analysed them.

The muddled overlaps and links between practices in the matrix fold onto interconnected experiences of sexuality, race, gender and religiosity that I found were relevant for practitioners' lives. I take a similar focus to Aisha Beliso-De Jesús (2013, 2014, 2015b) in exploring the nexus of gender, sexuality and race as interconnected assemblages in *la religión.* Beliso-De Jesús challenges us to examine how such religious traditions processually racialize and gender participants. I aim to examine spirits and practitioners alike as differently located racialised and gendered subjects.

This project explores *religiosos*' emphasis on embodied mothering and motherhood as a crucial part of women's lives. I draw attention to pragmatic concerns regarding family, sexuality, beauty, and the creative negotiations of the everyday that practitioners saw at the heart of being Cuban. In examining the life cycle for her interlocutors in Habana, Heidi Härkönen (2016) illuminates similar concerns which are located within the deep-seated importance of gender as an organising logic in the lives of Cubans. Härkönen also highlights the way her interlocutors were configured in relation to networks and communities, something I frame as crucial to the *religiosos* I work with.

I experienced these networks and communities as vital to understanding an *espiritista's* practice. Jafari Allen (2011) notes how for his interlocutors, Black Cuban self-making is understood through belonging. Allen's work, while not centred around *la religión,* has provided a useful dialogue for the relationships and community relevant to *religiosos*. Like Allen's research, I locate Black Cubans' experience in wider schemes of race, gender, and sexuality. I follow Allen in tracing the way Cubans reinforce, re-interpolate, and transcend their racialised, gendered, and sexualised identities and take Lorde's erotic (2007 [1984]) seriously as an analytic to do so. While I elaborate on the erotic below, for now I suggest that the erotic is distinctly well-placed to address the lived experiences of

my interlocutors as they cultivate community, knowledge, and themselves as *espiritistas* via embodied spiritual capacities.

This project's concern lies in the experiences of religiosity and how religiosity is implicated in all factors of practitioners' lives. While there has been much research conducted on *la religión*, there are very few examinations of *Espiritismo*, let alone *Espiritismo Cruzado.* Most examinations are chapters in wider investigations of 'Afro-Cuban religion.' My project intervenes here as I suggest further insight is needed to provide a more precise, richly detailed picture of *la religión* as it is lived.

The majority of work that is dedicated to *Espiritismo* has been conducted by Cuban scholars. The most prolific researchers investigating Cuban *Espiritismo* are Ileana Hodge and Aníbal Argüelles Mederos. They have spent decades exploring the different variants, including detailed examinations of *Espiritismo Cruzado*. Hodge (1994) has described the practice as a Cuban religious complex based on belief in spirits of the dead. She cites *Espiritismo Cruzado* as rooted in communication between two worlds: that of the living and that of the dead. She also takes note of the importance of *Africanos* and suggests *Espiritismo Cruzado* is a sort of 'Afro-Cuban' *Espiritismo.*[4] I build off this understanding though I have some divergences according to my ethnographic experience. For example, my project demonstrates the importance of embodied, collaborative practice over abstract belief, a collapse of the lines that might separate the world of the living and the world of the dead as discrete spheres, and the way other spirits besides *Africanos* play an important role in practice.

[4] Original quotation in Spanish: 'Espiritismo Cruzado, complejo religioso cubano que se basa en la creencia de la existencia y comunicación del mundo de los muertos con el mundo terrenal, en esta manifestación se apela al uso de representaciones de deidades africanas denominadas a la usanza de su versión afrocubana.'

I elaborate on Hodge and Argüelles' works by providing fine-grained ethnography so that a wider picture of how this religiosity is lived, not just what it *is*, can be recognised. Hodge has noted relevant gender dynamics and recognised the way women are able to navigate their religiosity on their own terms. My research goes further to show that collaborative knowledge production and processes of gendering (especially mothering) are woven into the fabrics of *Espiritismo Cruzado* practice.

Diana Espirito Santo offers a compelling study of *Espiritismo* in Cuba. Her work examines how processes of spiritual development illuminate questions of selfhood. I build on this work by exploring how *Espiritismo Cruzado* relates to everyday concerns which exist within a set of gendered and racialised norms. My thesis is interested in what practitioners' practical concerns are. Who and what contributes to them and who and what plays a role in easing them? My project looks at how practitioners are able to navigate their lives thanks to religious practice and community. Further, in connection to interlocutors' own interests at the forefront of my research, I intervene in claiming that race, gender, and sexuality are essential to my practitioners' religiosity and argue that *Espiritismo Cruzado* necessitates an engagement with the way *religiosos* experience these interlocking components of their lived realities. Having located my ethnographic explorations and findings within a longstanding tradition of anthropological and wider social science research below I continue by examining overarching topics that are central to this thesis. These are analytics that are significant, ethnographically driven themes that emerged in my research.

Key Themes

The major themes that thread throughout the thesis (mothers, trance, and knowledge production) are all, fundamentally, about mixing. A focus

on mixing reflects back onto what I have mentioned regarding '*Cruzado*.' For the purposes of this thesis, mixing signifies enmeshment, sharing, fluidity, ambiguity, tensions, congruencies and discontinuities all at the same time. Who mothers, what mothering is and how motherhood is constituted are all predicated on lines that are inherently, contextually blurry. Trance as a state is rife with ambiguity. Who is who? How and where do *muertos* and *religiosos* come together and what are the implications for this explicitly embodied meeting? And finally, knowledge production can only happen when different actors co-mingle and work as a wider whole. Thus, knowledge is predicated on a mixture of religious traditions and individual practitioners with spiritual community and *muertos*. I discuss ideas of mothers to provide empirical background as well as a conceptual framing for parts of *Espiritismo Cruzado* practice and the relationships that go along with them. This allows me to discuss the intersectional nature of my interlocutors' lived reality and situate them in a wider Cuban context.

Mothers

'[A] woman's body, with its potential for gestating, bringing forth and nourishing new life, has been through the ages a field of acute contradictions: a space invested with power, and an acute vulnerability' (Rich 1997 [1976]:102).

In this section I examine mothers as a key part of gendering and understanding bodies, primarily through motherhood and mothering. Among most of the Cubans I know it was understood that all women are inevitably going to be mothers.[5] Though I foreground fertility and reproduction, for my Cuban interlocutors a woman is a mother not only

[5] Personally, I knew of only four women who were not mothers: two lesbians, one trans woman, and one heterosexual woman. All of the *religiosas* I worked with were mothers. Infertility was not discussed and if I broached the subject several interlocutors located it as a problem '*afuera*' (outside of Cuba). With regards to the heterosexual couple who had no children I was told secondhand it was because the wife '*tiene una enfermedad'* (had a disease) that prevented her from having children, but there was no further elaboration.

due to an assumed potentiality or capacity to give birth, but also through actualising this capacity through raising children. In this thesis, I suggest that the conflation between womanhood and motherhood is a key component underlying *Espiritismo Cruzado* practice.

Mothers are figures who play a significant role in understanding and characterising *Espiritismo Cruzado.* For the Cubans I know, motherhood is important to comprehending womanhood. Motherhood signals a kind of respect that is not just abstract but also cements women in a position of strength, power and authority both in the family and community. I am better able to introduce and situate the ways that gender informs my interlocutors' lives more broadly by using mothers, motherhood and mothering as a starting point. This discussion provides a departure point for the thesis to examine how gender engages with religiosity.

Motherhood in Context

'For every male *espiritista*, there are 50 women. It is more straightforward for them, and they are *for* these things, because of their capacity to give birth,' a *palero* told me. It arose out of a conversation we had one morning about women in *Palo*. 'They say *Palo* is "a man's thing" and that is a stereotype, there are women. But it is also true. It is rough, and you have to do a lot of animal slaughters.'

I sipped at strong, sickly sweet coffee and asked, 'But they do sacrifices in *Santo*, too…?'

Nodding and swatting away several pesky mosquitos—it seemed the Communist party's (mostly referred to simply as 'the party') weekly fumigations to battle dengue and zika were doing little good—he conceded, 'Yes, but there is something different about *Palo*. You have to rule over your *nganga* [composite objects of bones, metals, and sticks

relevant to *Palo* practice]. In *Espiritismo* [*Cruzado*] it is calmer, better for women.' [6]

This brief ethnographic encounter demonstrates a common notion that, while other practices in the matrix were about 'blood,' a reference to animal sacrifices, *Espiritismo Cruzado* was about 'water,' referring to the glasses of water that make up the *bóveda*, spiritual altars used in *Espiritismo Cruzado* practice. The idea of *Espiritismo Cruzado* as *más sano* (calmer) conjures ideas of purity and its association with women, which merit unpacking. Practically speaking, I observed many occasions wherein women were 'rough' and ruled in the everyday. Yet these ideas of purity call to mind the concept of *Marianismo* (Stevens 1973), common in the Hispanic Americas. *Marianismo* divides into two lines of thinking, though there are obvious links in certain contexts. One line of thinking posits women as spiritually superior, a veneration that is directly linked to women's reproductive roles as mothers. The second line is that women are subordinate to husbands, fathers, and a Christian/Catholic God. Both of these components comprise an idealised womanhood. *Marianismo* has come under critique; a central one is highlighted by Mayblin. She writes, 'What most detractors of Marianismo seem opposed to is not so much the abstract assemblage of one group of characteristics (passive suffering and self-abnegation) set in contrast to another (penetrative power and aggression) but the assignment of femininity to the former and masculinity to the latter' (2010:69).

Reactions to *Marianismo* for this project are twofold. Since transatlantic slavery, in the Americas, Black women were associated with aggression rather than tenderness, marking them as 'unfeminine' (Beckles 1998:102). As enslaved persons, at least on the plantation, Black women performed the same hard labour tasks as men. Speaking of chattel slavery, Davis writes, 'to extract the greatest possible surplus from the

[6] *Ngangas* are also called *prendas*, *calderos*, or *fundamentos*.

labor of the slaves — the black woman had to be released from the chains of the myth of femininity' (1971:5). Ten years later in *Women, Race, and Class*, Davis writes:

> Like their men, Black women have worked until they could work no more. Like their men, they have assumed the responsibilities of family providers. The unorthodox feminine qualities of assertiveness and self-reliance—for which Black women have been frequently praised but more often rebuked—are reflections of their labor and their struggles outside of the home (1981:231).

Thus, while 'white women were enshrined as the heirs of Mary; black women could make no such claim' (Franklin 2012:33). As enslaved peoples, both men and women were hypersexualised, masculinised, and dehumanised, but women were particularly defeminised, hooks argues (1987 [1981]). She writes of the North American context, 'the social equality that characterized black sex role patterns in the work sphere under slavery did not create a situation that allowed black women to be passive (ibid 16,82). And in a post-plantation context like others of the Caribbean, Black and *Mulata* women's work in 'unfeminine' labour outside the home was commonplace as well (Barrow 1998: xiv; Beckles 1998:94). As such, the idealised, and tacitly White, womanhood that is epitomised in *Marianismo* is not well fitting. The components of hegemonic femininity associated with *Marianismo* were out of reach to Black women based on these sustained tools of exclusion.

There is often a breach between ideology and phenomenology when it comes to mothers-as-types versus the material reality of mothering. Again, while Marian concepts of sacrifice relevant elsewhere in Latin America and the Caribbean were not significant amongst my interlocutors, other spiritual notions of motherhood were. Practitioners described *orichas* such as Yemayá, Ochún, and Oyá as emblematic of idealised womanhood in being both warriors and mothers. In this way, idealisation and phenomenological experiences of mothering are in

conversation as independence, innovation, hard work, and willpower were the contextual feminine qualities that many of my interlocutors valorised and endeavoured to achieve. I observed women strive to live up to these idealisations as they were also in dialogue with the need to hustle as mothers in the precarity Cubans face in the post-Soviet moment.

It is important to note, but also to not romanticise, these characteristics which *espiritistas* described were due to necessity. These qualities are strongly linked to mothering. The aforementioned attributes complicate the femininity associated with *Marianismo,* but do not negate femininity as such. Indeed, 'Like African women and their sisters in the diaspora, Caribbean women critically link[ed] work and the need to labor to their responsibilities as mothers' (Osirim 1997:42). Nonetheless, the idea from *Marianismo* discourse that women purportedly possess a kind of spiritual superiority is a relevant assumption that explicates part of *Espiritismo Cruzado* usefully.

My interlocutors were defined as women by the so-called natural role of mother, often via their reproduction (Thorne 1982: 6). While this relates back to Caribbean slavery, which disrupted conjugal bonds but typically left mother-child relationships in place, as a framework its emphasis was not at the forefront of my interlocutor's lived experiences (see also Frazier 1942; Herskovits 1941). Yet slavery and its legacies do elucidate why some notions of motherhood do not resonate with my interlocutors' relationships to being mothers. Adrienne Rich (1997[1976]) distinguished between two strains of motherhood, intervening on early White feminism that posited woman as prisoner to her body due to the supposed bodily vulnerability of cis-women's reproduction, including menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, and nursing (cf. de Beauvoir 1997 [1949]). One strain of motherhood concerns 'the potential relationship of any woman to her powers of reproduction and to children; and the institution, which aims at ensuring that the potential—and all women—shall remain under male control' (Rich 1997[1976]:13). Rather than motherhood as an

incarceration or experience of alienation (ibid), my interlocutors generally spoke about motherhood as being financially difficult but helping them relate to, understand, and engage their bodies and selves more fully.

Indeed, Rich later notes, 'At certain points in history, and in certain cultures, the idea of woman-as-mother has worked to endow women with respect, even awe' (ibid). Current relationships with being a mother do not exist in a vacuum and like in other post-colonial (and particularly post-plantation) sites, Black and to a great extent *Mulata* women did not have control over their bodies, in terms of their sexuality or reproduction (Pérez 2013: 15). As Mahmood points out: 'Native American and African American feminists argue that freedom, for them, consisted in being able to form families, since the long history of slavery, genocide, and racism has operated precisely by breaking up their communities and social networks (cf. Brant 1984; Collins 1991; A. Davis 1983; Lorde 1984)' (2005:13).

The Soviet-era course of parenting seemed to have lost relevance for my interlocutors as well. The party's Family Code of 1975 mandated that parenting be equally shared between mother and father[7] (Franklin 2012:21-22). How to implement this law on the micro level was clearly not thought through. The legislation itself only vaguely decrees co-parenting, and this, I was told by my interlocutors, was not actually

[7] Safa writes of the Family Code: 'The Cuban revolutionary state was not pleased with the increase in consensual unions and in female-headed households and tried to encourage conjugal ties and especially marriage by making them more egalitarian and prestigious. That was the purpose of the 1975 Family Code, which spelled out the equal responsibilities of husband and wife and removed the remaining distinctions between legal marriage and consensual union. However, it seems apparent that reforming legal marriage was not sufficient to convince women that it was preferable to consensual union. Men's continued insistence on their privileges and resistance to assuming domestic responsibilities may also have dampened their enthusiasm' (2009:46).

applied in any of their marriages or childrearing experiences.[8] The revolutionary period (approximately 1959-1991) did involve some state-run laundries, cafeterias, and day care centres, which may have contributed to the façade of equal parenting. However, it was women who still occupied these gendered-roles, despite doing so via the party (Härkönen 2016:74). Since the Special Period, the post-Soviet climate in Cuba that ushered in severe economic hardship, the party has been unable to maintain these policies and much of this work has fallen on mothers and their women family members anew.

Women's lives have taken on new dimensions (Bengelsdorf 1997:229)—mothers are framed as those who actively fight for survival as they are tasked with overall societal maintenance. All Cubans are forced to make do in everyday precarity. There are several shorthands for the processes of navigating this material insecurity: *luchando* (fighting), *inventando* (making do; literally 'iinventing'), and *resolviendo* (resolving the myriad of problems Cubans confront, both minute and grand). Mothers in particular have to creatively manage the challenges of everyday life and be adept at several other roles: provider and worker (usually of multiple jobs), appropriate communist (to varying degrees, often in conflict with the role of provider and worker), wife, neighbour, friend, practitioner (usually of several religious traditions). Creatively navigating numerous roles, being savvy providers, and all of the other active work involved in mothering influences the thesis' characterisation of Cuban mothers as hustlers who creatively negotiate everyday problems.

The norm for my interlocutors, as I learned it, was for mothers and other mothering kin to occupy a dual role of nurturer and protector, much like *muertos* whose purpose is to guide, to help, and in some cases to prevent bad things from coming to pass. Those who mother are not only

[8] Article 26 of the Family Code (Law 1289) mandates cooperation in 'the education, upbringing and guidance of children according to the principles of socialist morality.'

nurturing, and not necessarily tender, but can be harsh and severe. Pérez notes this severity-as-nurturing as a kind of parenting pattern 'often pursued by socio-politically disadvantaged women: preparing children for the world's hardships by "toughening them up" at home' (2013:29). The cycle that became evident to me during my fieldwork was thus: in the context of *Espiritismo Cruzado*, spirits are the source of knowledge; they communicate this knowledge to *espiritistas*. Novice *espiritistas* learn how to engage and hone the capacity to communicate with spirits and produce this knowledge from mostly mothers and mothering kin.

Mothering

> Mothering. Claiming some power over who we choose to be and knowing that such power is relative within the realities of our lives. Yet knowing that only through the use of that power can we effectually change those realities. Mothering means the laying to rest what is weak, timid, and damaged—without despisal—the protection and support of what is useful for survival and change, and our joint exploration of the difference (Lorde 2007[1984]: 173-174).

Mothering as laid out above offers a useful analytic and entry point for envisaging *Espiritismo Cruzado*. If motherhood can be understood to a certain extent as a kind of identity, mothering can be framed as relating to practices (Walks 2011: 19). To unpack mothering, I examine the quote line by line. 'Claiming some power over who we choose to be'— this can be read as indicative of spiritual development, which will be discussed throughout the thesis. In the context of *Espiritismo Cruzado*, the thesis will suggest there is inherent power in one's spiritual capacities, but that power is latent until those capacities are developed. 'Knowing that power is relative within the realities of our lives'—my interlocutors often emphasised that the power in spiritual capacity is relative to the *muertos* that endow you with it.

'[T]hrough the use of that power we can effectually change those realities;' this likens to one's abilities as an *espiritista* as serving a

practical purpose, which will be highlighted throughout the thesis. Abilities affect change by improving the material lives of practitioners. 'Mothering means laying to rest what is weak, timid, and damaged—without despisal'—this is a point expanded upon directly in chapter four. A greater sense of self and trust is cultivated in practice and spiritual development. There were numerous occasions when, after particularly rigorous work with *muertos*, I asked interlocutors if they were tired. They told me they felt the opposite: energised and powerful. I indeed observed that they were livelier and more confident. Just as much as cultivating and learning, the process of spiritual development has tones of unlearning weakness for strength; timidity for confidence; damage for improvement.

And finally, 'the protection and support of what is useful for survival and change, and our joint exploration of the difference,'—again, this is relevant to much of the thesis as other *espiritistas* in equal measure to *muertos* offer protection and support. This protection and support provides for survival and change, both in the sense of the daily requirement of making ends meet and in terms of one's spiritual progression, which relates to one's self-esteem and ideas of self-worth. The notion of mothering as a joint effort, both as a metaphor for *Espiritismo Cruzado* and related to Cuban ideas of mothers, can be understood through Patricia Hill Collins' 'othermother.' She writes: 'African and African-American communities have also recognised that vesting one person with full responsibility of mothering a child may not be wise or possible. As a result, "othermothers," women who assist bloodmothers by sharing mothering responsibilities, traditionally have been central to the institution of Black womanhood' (2000 [1990]:178).

Hill Collins clearly illustrates how mothering is an action not limited to biological mothers or even necessarily blood relatives. I do not take the idea of women as inherently associated with birth or motherhood for granted, but rather I follow Carsten's argument, in the suggestion that 'rather than taking sexual difference for granted, we should examine how

it is understood in different cultures' (Carsten 2004: 69; see also Yanagisako and Collier 1987). In addition to exploring the claims my interlocutors maintain about the link between femininity and 'female' bodies, the thesis examines gendered ways of being and knowing. Mothering sheds light on how certain (ideas of) bodies arise as particular creativities and productivities are mapped on to them, which will also be pertinent to my examination of trance and knowledge production shortly.

Parenthood and motherhood were explicitly important for the Cubans I engaged with. Again, womanhood and motherhood were often conflated. The rhetoric and ideologies of woman/mother that are currently relevant date back to independence and were popularised by José Martí's acclaim for *mambisas* (Stoner 1991:29). Both guerrilla warriors and mothers, *mambisas* cared for their children and fought against the Spanish, again hinting at an idea of women and femininity as encompassing both strength and courage alongside caring and rearing in a dynamic way that denies them mutual exclusivity (ibid 56).

Trance

One *espiritista* addressed an elderly woman and asked if she had a spirit that dragged one foot behind when they walked. The woman nodded and then suddenly fell into trance—whooping, clapping, feet stomping. Her eyes rolled back in her head and she convulsed. The spirit was now dancing, hopping on one foot and screaming. They fell to their knees, throwing both arms up. Then they lay on the ground as if greeting an *oricha*. Now their eyes were covered, and they were crying, weeping. The other *espiritista* stood in front of the spirit unfazed by this garish presentation and told the *muerto*, as if to casually inform him to behave more gently with the older *espiritista's* body, 'That material [body] is not yours. Do not abuse it.'

In the above, brief ethnographic vignette a practitioner tells a *muerto* who has mounted a fellow *espiritista* not to abuse her body because it is not his. The body is shared, as indexed by the mixture of pronouns—'her, they, him.' Trance in the context of *Espiritismo Cruzado* can be most simply characterised as the sharing of one's body with spirits. An *espiritista*'s body does not wholly belong to her, nor is it the property of the *muerto*. Sharing a body seems to be the most accurate framing, as a *muerto* is not 'occupying' an *espiritista*'s body. Importantly, trance is an ethnographic term. In addition to 'passing *muertos'* or being 'mounted' by them, practitioners spoke about '*caerse en trance'* (falling into trance). Possession is a term that may be recognised but was hardly ever used by *religiosos.* It seemed that because the body is not property, one cannot relate to it in terms of ownership (i.e. possession) (Johnson 2011). Better, rather, would be to understand the body as shared material. This understanding, furthermore, is useful as it helps introduce the way trance in this context cannot depend on the idea of the subject as a kind discrete, individual self (ibid).

I.M Lewis (2003 [1971]: 15) discusses possession as 'ecstasy,' or the 'privileged channel of communication between man and the supernatural.' In contrast, my interlocutors in all religious traditions of the matrix repeatedly stressed to me that there was nothing 'supernatural' about *la religión,* spirits, or trance. On the contrary*, la religión* is characterised as being natural, both in terms of the everyday and mundane but also in terms of the environmental resources that allow for most practices in *la religión* to be actualised. Lewis (ibid 49) and Bourguignon (1967) categorise possession as either centred around exorcism or adoricism. Simplified understandings of the two categories might posit the former as negative, uncontrolled, or unsolicited and in need of dispelling; the latter engages trance as positive, controlled, solicited, and includes building relationships with spirits. *Espiritismo Cruzado* is generally the latter.

Lewis argued that spirit possession is a mechanism by which women intentionally resist their subordination. In this context, the intentionality of multiple actors—spirit, *espiritista*, spiritual family and community—all come together to actualise spirit communication and presence via trance possession. Unlike Lewis' outline of trance possession, my interlocutors did not speak about coming to their engagement with *Espiritismo Cruzado* via illness. Incorporating spirits into the *espiritistas*' material bodies via trance is seen not as an affliction but as a blessing, as demonstrated in the language of *caridades* or charities. Lambek's work effectively links knowledge and authority through trance and in a manner that is similar to the relationships *espiritistas* have with their spirits. He writes, knowledge 'derives ostensibly from access to other "persons," namely the spirits—beings to whom hosts periodically abdicate their consciousness. These beings penetrate the bodies of their hosts and are made manifest by what they do to bodies' (2015 [1993]:306).

Trance as a creative, embodied phenomenon is not limited to *Espiritismo Cruzado*. It is a crucial part of other religious traditions in the matrix. However, *religiosos* commonly treat falling into trance as definitive of *Espiritismo Cruzado* in particular. Materialising spirits through the body transforms the medium symbolically. Importantly, spirits do not occupy a world apart (cf. Stoller 1997 [1989]), but rather are entirely immanent and are present in the everyday social worlds of Cubans. In this introductory discussion of trance, I establish the importance of the body in *Espiritismo Cruzado*.

The body in trance—as shared and penetrated—demonstrates parallels with sex and pregnancy. This idea of the shared body also disturbs dichotomous understandings of autonomy. I will touch upon the notion of trance as communication, and a particularly embodied mode at that, before continuing on to elaborate on ideas of communication with spirits and knowledge production. The body-in-trance demonstrates the most

obviously legible coming together of *espiritista* and spirit or of sharing a body.

The physicality of knowing is explicitly manifested in relevant frameworks of knowledge production. The idea of women as open is often associated with women's capacity to give birth.[9] It reflects the idea that women are somehow more connected to their 'psyche' and emotions but also physical sensation and experience (David and Davis-Floyd 1996: 247). At the same time, following the Foucauldian notion that power is not a binary of who has it and who does not (cf. Mbembe 1992), sharing a body—that is, it being your own and also not your own (Boddy 1989)—demonstrates a kind of value in what at first glance appears to be a lack of bodily autonomy.

Trance, Pregnancy, and Sex—the Shared Body

The theme of shared bodies creates parallels between *Espiritismo Cruzado* and motherhood via pregnancy. As in pregnancy, for *espiritistas* very often their bodies include others. In this case, these others are their *muertos*. The bodily norms of pregnancy and trance can create subjects as mothers and *espiritistas*, respectively. Examining trance alongside ideas of pregnancy or reproduction sheds light on the power dynamics and complicated relationships at play between *espiritistas* and *muertos.* It is important to recall, however, that not all people have the ability to fall into trance, and not even all *espiritistas* have the capacity to utilise it as a methodology. This contrasts other contexts wherein trance may be an inherent human aptitude (Lambek 2015 [1993]:335).

Still, pregnancy and reproduction serve 'as a base from which we can learn about other cultural aspects' (Walks 2011:7), such as religiosity. Using these analytics also allows me to disturb ideas about (bodily)

[9] See chapters six and seven to see how men engage these analytics and popular conceptualisations of trance.

autonomy as a zero-sum game of either having it, or not. Gutmann writes of challenging such notions as well. He notes that, 'Clearly one obstacle that must be overcome in studying sexual passivity is [framing it as] the mirror opposite of activity' (2003:9).

Starting from the point of the shared body, sex and reproduction as metaphors for trance allow for taking the ethnographic language seriously: *montarse* (to mount). This project rejects the dualistic framing of power/powerlessness to describe the body's necessary vulnerability while in trance. Yet it is no coincidence that the most common phrasing to refer to falling into trance is *montarse,* to be mounted by a spirit. Matory notes this metaphor of sex in the linguistics of the Yoruban verb '*gùn*' in *oricha* possession. Meaning 'to mount,' *gùn* is a word used in three contexts: to refer to when a rider mounts a horse, a male human or animal aggressively mounting a female sexual partner, or when an *oricha* mounts a priest (2005:211). These dynamics differ slightly in post-colonial, plantation contexts. hooks writes: 'Since sexuality in the West has been linked to fantasies of domination from its inception (the domination of nature, of women), African people in the so-called new world were automatically entering a setting where the sexual script was encoded with sadomasochistic rituals of domination, of power and play' (2003:65).

Boddy's work has also highlighted the relationship between sex and fertility and trance (1989). In some ways, Boddy's examination of *zār* possession offers stark differences to the context of *Espiritismo Cruzado*. They especially differ in their associations regarding the relationship between women and trance. While both contexts find a link between fertility and possession, Hofriyati women are related to enclosure, and enclosure with fertility (Boddy 1989:58). In the Hofriyati context, women are understood as needing to be purified (ibid 4). The idea of closing off that which is threatening is juxtaposed with openness as a blessing to allow for relationships with spirits. This difference could in part be due to

the way different categories of spirits are understood and experienced in different settings. Women in the framework of *la religión* are seen as more 'purely' spiritual and assumed to be more open, with openness serving as a signal of fertility and read positively. Yet there are similarities between Boddy's context and *Espiritismo Cruzado* as well. As Boddy discusses, the social status that women gain in their practice as *espiritistas* comes not from becoming 'more like men' but reifying the qualities that make them read socially and physically as women (ibid 56), again, such as motherhood.

For *religiosos,* trance possession comes down to questions of gender because the context in which it occurs is steeped with gender as an organising logic. Gender, both in terms of rhetoric and embodied experience, contributes to how meanings are reproduced and created (Boddy 1989: 57). Boddy writes of the gender complementarity among her interlocutors in terms of men as 'cold' and women as 'hot,' citing various exemplifications. The Cubans I know also invested heavily in notions of gender complementarity. However, my interlocutors, when referring to gender and temperature, often described men as 'hot blooded,' associating them with sex and desire. Women, on the other hand, were cool tempered or cool headed, referring to women having to remain calm to get all the tasks of everyday life completed.

While Boddy's work on trance, in many ways, serves as a foil, Lambek's offers some useful parallels. Lambek argues that for his interlocutors in Mayotte, as is similar to my observations of *espiritistas*, 'knowledge [is] gained from spirits, especially from the intimate relationship that often develops between spirits and their human hosts [. . .] possession [is] a means of knowledge,' (2015 [1993]: 305). Below I examine the complex dynamics of 'authority that such knowledge carries with it' (ibid). Like Lambek, I take trance to be a mode of communication (1980; 1989). Yet, while I see it as a form of communicating with spirits, I do not frame it as an idiom for something else (Blanes and Espirito Santo 2014:22).

Lambek's work allows for me to transition from trance into a broader discussion regarding knowledge production. He discusses trance as a form of accessing 'a valid source of power and knowledge. The possessed can acquire compelling and authoritative voices' (2015 [1993]:322). Additionally, Lambek writes the following of knowledge

> [. . .] it seems wrong to characterise this relationship as one of "having" rather than "being" or "doing." Embodied knowledge is less an object to be handled (acquired, stored, retrieved, etc.; cf. McKellin n.d.), than an activity performed. In line with my general shift of focus from structure to practice, I am urging a shift of emphasis from nouns to verbs (cf. Shafer 1976, 1978). To begin with, we could speak of "knowing how" rather than "knowing that." This seems appropriate for depicted various kinds of embodied knowing (ibid 307).

If one's trajectory as an *espiritista* is predicated on a *don*, or intrinsic capacity, it seems that it could be conceptualised as something one 'has.' Yet it is equally assumed by practitioners that active, collaborative knowledge production relevant to *Espiritismo Cruzado* is something that is done in embodied, communal work. People speak about *Espiritismo Cruzado* practice as, above all, '*trabajar con los muertos'* (working with *muertos*). Working with *muertos*, often but not only through trance, means working with a body. This body is necessarily shared by actors. Having a body means having a tool through which *muertos* can communicate their *caridades* to *espiritistas*, and by extension collaboratively produce knowledge.

Embodied Knowledge Production: Collaboration and Imagination

As introduced in my discussion of trance, the *espiritista* is necessarily both agent and patient (cf. Mittermaier 2012a). Following on from the above exploration of trance, one of the primary modes of communication between *espiritista* and *muerto*, I now transition into a wider conversation regarding methodologies of communication more broadly and pay attention to how they are taken up by *religiosos.* In this thesis I will demonstrate how, in addition to gendering happening via the

demographics of the practitioners, ways of relating to spirits and how these ways of relating are read as feminine also contribute to the gendering of spiritual practice. The messages spirits communicate to practitioners can be characterised in terms of processes of knowledge production. These messages, called *caridades,* are manifested in forms such as *pre-sentir* (pre-feeling), *claridad* (spiritual intuition; literally 'clearness'), *vista* (sight), *oído* (sound), and dreams.[10] Because there is a focus on openness and therefore a porosity of being, *caridades* other than trance also problematise the notion of autonomy as a desirable position; as Mahmood notes, it is possible— and in the context of *Espiritismo Cruzado* especially relevant— that 'submission to certain forms of (external) authority is a condition for achieving the subject's potential' (2005:31).

As Espirito Santo argues, to know from *muertos* means to know certainly (2012a: 267). However, communications from *muertos* should not be taken as definitive as they often also offer guidance on how to actualise or prevent the *caridades* they share depending on the goals or desires of the recipient. In this way, the knowledge relevant to *Espiritismo Cruzado* is not objectified knowledge, that is, 'a truth about the world waiting to be discovered,' but instead an embodied part of the self that has practical implications in life (Lambek 2015 [1993]:8).

As Lambek frames it: 'knowledge has an indexical, personal function; what one knows is not fully distinguishable from what one does or who one is' (ibid 6). Akin to this framing, knowing as doing can also be applied to notions of mothering and motherhood. Pregnancy and giving birth can only be known in practice. You literally cannot know how to *do* pregnancy or birth until you do it. Mothering, as a practice done by many different people, not only biological mothers, is similarly known through

[10] Both the Cuban Catholic influence and the Protestant influence that grounds Scientific Spiritism are reflected in referring to these methodologies as *caridades*.

practice, and can only exist through active engagement with other people. That is to say, mothers are mothering children.

Lorde's notion of the erotic, which will be used to think with at different points of the thesis, provides a useful framework for recognising how forms of communication between *espiritista* and *muerto* unfold, and therefore it follows, a useful framing for understanding *Espiritismo Cruzado.* As Lorde writes of the erotic, it is based on an assertion of the life-force of women (2007 [1984]:55). Here there is a strong likeness to the rhetoric surrounding *Espiritismo Cruzado:* that there is *something* about women that makes them more involved in the practice—and potentially even better equipped to be *espiritistas*. Lorde links the life-force of women with creative energy as empowering knowledge (2007 [1984]:55), which others tie to mothering as creative and intuitive acts (Ross 2014: 55).

As seen in the idea that women are 'naturally' more involved in *Espiritismo Cruzado* practice, many *religiosos* emphasised the concept of *facultad*, or faculty. *La religión* amplifies rhetoric that people are born with certain faculties which allow for or inhibit different ways of living, as seen for example, through discussions of the *don.* In assessing her own classic text (1974) 'Is female to male as nature is to culture?', Ortner highlights shortcomings, among them a 'big problem surrounding the use of the nature/culture opposition concerns the seeming attribution of universality to certain meanings of "nature" and "culture"' (1996:178). In the context of *Espiritismo Cruzado*, I noticed that such a binary may exist, but the meanings associated to each side of the dichotomy differ. The following words of a *palero* illuminate this:

> A *babalawo* [practitioner of *Ifá*] can be mediocre but not a

> *palero* or *espiritista*. Because *babalawos* can fall back on the written,[11] this is to say nowadays they never need to have a spiritual talent or capacity. [12] It is easy, if done like this, to consult for *Ifá*—easier than *Palo* or *Espiritismo [Cruzado]*. There is no creativity, imagination, intelligence, nor emotion.

In reference to *Espiritismo Cruzado,* which like *Palo* centres around direct relationships with *muertos*, I found the popular understanding was that just as women-as-mothers create via their own physiological being, *espiritistas* produce knowledge via their own natural *don*. Associations made between women and nature, which typically work to women's disfavour are flipped in *Espiritismo Cruzado*. Differently, *babalawos* who for example have to do a kind of 'book learning,' are understood by this *palero* as lesser, lesser in the sense that it comes from an accumulation and memorisation of information as mastery rather than explicitly from one's 'inherent' talent or capacity. As the *palero* above says, creativity, imagination and emotion are crucial to practices like *Espiritismo Cruzado.*

Muertos' *caridades* are brought into being through imaginative knowledge production. Imagination occurs not in relation to belief but in relation to a mode of authoritative knowledge production. Imagination is not a conjuring up of illusory images. Nor is imagination imperceptible to the senses—it is somatic communication, felt both emotionally and physically.[13] Imagination is used to relate and communicate relevant messages through intersubjective means that are not artistic, romantic or novel but still creative. As Mittermaier suggests of dreams as communications in the Egyptian context, the dead are unique sources of knowledge precisely because they are dead (2011), making them

[11] *Babalawos*' divination methodology involves *signos/odu* (signs) that reference *patakí,* a series of sacred legends or myths that were part of an oral tradition but are now written and circulated as text.
[12] In reference to this interlocutors' use of 'nowadays,' with the increasing commercialisation of Yoruban derived religious traditions, there is common rhetoric that many *babalawos* in the last 15 years or so have lost respect for *Ifá* and are inferior to their elders.
[13] For more on problematising imagination as it relates to a particular trajectory of European philosophy see Mittermaier 2012b.

especially suited in engaging in these dialogues of guiding, warning and directing people in their lives.

As Espirito Santo writes, 'Imagination is thus seen as a greater function of a collective of spirits, rather than as an individual cognitive property or effect' (2015a: 167). While there is rhetoric that *caridades* come to the *espiritista* from the spirit, there is also an idea of actively engaging in the world in a particular way in order for *caridades* to come into being, what could be characterised as a 'tuning in' (Mittermaier 2011:19). Yet it is not possible to produce knowledge alone and, as such, I would argue that a framework centred solely on selfhood may be limiting. What I observed was a collaborative co-production. The processes through which the *caridades* take on meaning necessarily happen within a community or spiritual family. These imaginative processes again map back on to Cuban mothers' creative ingenuity to *inventar*, something that inevitably requires the support of those around her.

Feeling-as-Knowing (Embodied and Emotional)

As a group, and thanks to *muertos*, *espiritistas* produce knowledge via the creative, spiritual capacities they have. Again, the ethnography throughout the thesis shows spiritual energy as rooted in feeling, both emotional and sensorial. Knowledge production via spirits cements *espiritista*'s authority, and thus power. Following Lorde, I take the erotic as a form of emotional intersubjectivity that produces knowledge as a kind of creative power rooted in the information *muertos* provide (see 2007 [1984]: 54). The erotic helps me tie together these embodied and emotional ways of knowing and their spiritual sources. The processes at play in *Espiritismo Cruzado* can be characterised as erotic knowledge production, in that they are sensual, physical, emotional and psychic expressions (Lorde 2007[1984]:56) that allow *espiritistas* to come to know what they do. One *espiritista* told me that working with and

through spirits requires a certain kind of intelligence and in turn, working with and through spirits makes one more intelligent.

My interlocutor defined this intelligence as 'emotionally aware and sensitive.' Here I follow others like Allen's work regarding the erotics of black self-making in Cuba that utilises the erotic as 'a site of knowledge production and energy,' (Allen 2011:96) which can serve as 'a catalyst for the creation of community' (ibid 97). And, just as not all *espiritistas* in my thesis are women, Lorde demonstrates that the erotic, though lying in a 'deeply female and spiritual plane,' 'is a resource that is within each of us' (Lorde 2007[1984]:53). Allen and Gil influence this project as anthropologists who have explored Lordean erotics as relevant to Black Caribbean folks as an intimate, affectionate and empathetic community building tool but also an experience.

There are several other social scientists who have, as Gil eloquently puts it, utilised 'a Lorde-inspired erotics to think through quotidian experience and imaginative possibility in the African diaspora (Weir-Soley 2009; Tinsley 2010; Sheller 2012; King 2014)' (Gil 2018:6; see also Alexander 2005). Importantly, Lorde's conceptual framing of the erotic is employed in this thesis not because other anthropologists of religious knowledge production do not speak to bridging work that recognises knowledge as cultivated at the intersection of the physical, psychic and sensual. Csordas (1993) and Lambek (2015 [1993[), who are relevant throughout the thesis, demonstrate these contributions. However, Lorde's erotic is a recurring and central analytic because she crucially emphasises the importance of the political nature of such a combination especially for marginalised subjects. She overtly states that through the erotic, 'not only do we touch our most profoundly creative source, but we do that which is female and self-affirming in the face of racist, patriarchal, and anti-erotic society' (2007 [1984]:59). Lorde as a Caribbean 'Black Mother Woman' (1992:100-101) –and by extension 'warrior' (1980)— who rooted her theorising in lived experience most appropriately helps this thesis think

through the lived experiences of other Black Caribbean Mother Women in Cuba fighting in '*la lucha*.'

Like the erotic, when taken conceptually, queerness can speak to 'tracing the epistemological conditions of possibility' (Puar 2009: 7-8). Both Gil and Allen have developed the use of Lorde's erotic as an analytic to examine ethnography concerning 'queer' Caribbeans, again primarily of Colour. There has been an expansive conceptualisation of the notion of 'queer' regarding modes of non-normativity beyond solely same-sex desiring or gender nonconforming subjects, especially in terms of sexualised racialisation (Allen 2011; Gil 2018; Muñoz 1999; Puar 2009). Indeed, Puar illuminates that undertaking a 'queer ethnography' can 'decenter the fixation on sexual identificatory taxonomies and sexual object choice, focusing instead on reading practices as the basis of its queerness' (2009:7-8). Yet at the same time, there is a danger of queerness as an untethered hermeneutic that strays too far from the lived experiences of 'sexual minorities,' primarily but not exclusively same sex desire or practice.

While some scholars object to the label of 'queer' as it does not register for many Caribbean folks as an identity category (Nixon 2017: 103), Nixon also voices trepidation regarding the over-elasticity of queerness. She writes the followings:

> For me, these contestations and negotiations reflect a broader troubling of queer politics by people of color, particularly in response to the popular notion that one can now "queer" anything— and then we must ask, What about people who live queer lives, who embody queerness, especially those at the margins of race, class, gender, sexuality, and so on? While queer theory and its intersections with feminist and postcolonial theory has offered dynamic ways of theorizing the complexities of culture, identities, and experiences [. . .] What is at stake in using queer or not using queer? What about the lives, loves, and experiences of people who are same-sex desiring and loving, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or gender nonconforming or who engage in nonnormative sexual practices in the Caribbean? (ibid 104)

In light of the above unease, and in recognition of 'what is at stake,' I refrain from thinking with queerness until the end of the thesis wherein it becomes more ethnographically relevant. While 'nonnormative' modes of being and therefore knowing are present throughout the ethnographic material, it is not until ethnographically salient discourses surrounding same sex practices are overtly pertinent that I return to these questions of queerness. Instead I focus on Audre Lorde's use of the erotic for several reasons.

I encourage the reader to—as enacted through the experiences of erotic, places such as Cuba, complicated matrices like *la religión* and practices like *Espiritismo Cruzado* in particular— let go of some investments in discrete lines, boundaries or dichotomies such as analysis/feeling; thoughts/emotions; science/poetry or theorist/activist. Indeed, Lyndon Gil asks, 'What might it mean to add "theorist" to the mantric litany of descriptors used to summon the warrior poet?' (2018:5). He goes on to suggest that taking Audre Lorde seriously in scholarship on 'African diaspora communities comes one breath closer to recognizing some of the fruitful theoretical interventions cultivated from the soil' (ibid) of those we as Caribbeanists are speaking to and with.

Typically, the erotic as power and knowledge is suppressed; this suppression is especially relevant for women, people of Colour[14], and two-fold for women of Colour who are doubly devalued. Because the erotic is a power rooted in deep feeling, Lorde explains that many, especially (Black) women have been taught to distrust it; access to this power would be dangerous. Isolating particular people from their erotic power, she suggests, helps keep these people in distant/inferior positions. I will demonstrate how the ethos of *Espiritismo Cruzado* practice is about

[14] In this thesis when saying 'of Colour' I refer to Cubans whose phenotypes include and span between *Mulato* and *Negro*.

supporting and sanctioning deep feeling, and thus the erotic knowledge (Lorde 2007[1984]:53-54). While my interlocutors did not discuss the erotic as such, when returning to Cuba since working with a Lordean sense of the erotic, we chatted about the concept. When the erotic is broken down to its components—the psychic, intellectual, spiritual and embodied gesturing to sensual knowledge—*espiritistas* felt well represented and pleased. One *religiosa* relayed that she was content with someone who looked like (and crucially fought like them) as one of the 'intellectual protagonists' of my thesis. They pointed out to me that her framework of the erotic, which famously bridges the spiritual and the political through feeling, neatly bridges what is so obvious to them—the connection between *Espiritismo Cruzado* and '*la lucha'* or the necessary hustle of the everyday life of Cuban women and mothers.

In the context of *Espiritismo Cruzado,* rather than an association between women and feeling or emotions being a justification for dismissing them (Jaggar 1989: 165), this very association indexes women as having the capacity for useful, necessary, productive action. The emotional is crucial to conceptualisations of knowledge and processes of knowledge production. Feeling is the most elemental form of communication with spirits. Despite it being a veiled recognition, sometimes manifested in a respect for *muertos* more than *espiritistas* themselves, *Espiritismo Cruzado* allows for women to be recognised for abilities which are often diminished (Hodge, personal communication 23 August 2016). In the context of *Espiritismo Cruzado* practice, feelings come from the spiritual energy that spirits provide. *Sentir,* framed both as emotional feeling, and *presentir*, pre-feeling, refer to one's emotional states as a means of knowing something certainly via spirits and knowing something out of time or place.[15] Unique to *espiritistas*, feeling, like all modes of communication with spirits, is often the vehicle for 'authoritative

[15] I translate *presentimiento* as pre-feeling rather than premonition to draw attention to the idea of feeling something out of time. However, pre-feeling can also be premonitory.

knowledge' (Davis and Davis-Floyd 1996); that is, knowledge that motivates decision and action.

Once an *espiritista* is further developed she comes to know when and which feelings to judge as *caridades*, meaning that feelings coming from *muertos* always 'make sense.' Feeling was often framed as *claridad* (intuition) or sensitivity. I refer to Davis-Floyd and Davis and their useful citation of Bastick's definition of intuition to unpack the concept further. Intuition is framed as something that is comprised of some of the following: 'confidence in the process [of intuition]'; a 'sense of certainty' in this process; 'the association of affect with insight'; 'the empathetic aspect of intuition'; and the 'relationships between intuition and creativity' (Bastick 1982 as cited in Davis-Floyd and Davis 1996:240). As emotion or feeling is typically attributed to women due to its supposed relationship with femininity, there has been a historically long-standing dismissal of feelings, women, people of Colour, and especially women of Colour's feelings (Jaggar 1989: 163).

Emotion is a source of active, expressive response. *Espiritistas* articulated that trust in one's intuition was crucial. Self-confidence, especially in reference to one's own instincts is a result of the proof spirits demonstrate to you. Thus, it is understood as logical to trust in yourself because you have established trust and confidence in your *muertos*. One practitioner told me in reference to *claridad*: 'It is something like when I reach the limits of the knowledge I have, and I do not know what to do, what the next step is—when I am then able to resolve a situation like that, I know it is my *muertos.'* Another *espiritista* described spiritual intuition as, 'a combination of emotional intelligence and harmony with your spirits.' What could for others be perceived as personality traits, such as empathy or sensitivity, for *espiritistas* were actually endowed spiritual capacities. I argue embodied feeling as examined vis a vis *Espiritismo Cruzado* helps elucidate ideas of knowledge production, gender, and authority. This way of feeling involves an intersubjective process between

spirits and *espiritistas.* Again*, espiritistas* have an authority that comes from their advantageous correspondence with these spirits who are the absolute authorities, signalling their own creative, spiritual potency. Like other contexts of spirits in African diaspora religiosity, *muertos*' authority comes from knowing the unknowable (Matory 2003:209).

The complex combination of relationships allows for knowledge to be felt and communicated. While elsewhere there may be a devaluation of intuitive kinds of knowledge, in *Espiritismo Cruzado* practice feelings constitute knowledge and emotion serves as imperative means of communication with *muertos*. For the *espiritistas* I worked with, trusting feeling through physical experience is important as well. For *espiritistas*, their bodies are among their 'sharpest knowledge tool[s]' (Espirito Santo 2012: 267). For example, when I asked one *espiritista* how she could tell the difference between a chill and a chill-as-message she told me plainly: 'One knows their body. I know what is normal for me. So, if something happens without explanation, something out of the ordinary for me as a person, that provides me a better understanding of myself and proves *claridad.'*

Bodily knowledge is central to *Espiritismo Cruzado* practice and will be discussed throughout the thesis. However, if a bodily knowing is perceived, implicitly or explicitly, as a 'woman's way of knowing,' there is the risk of essentialising the category of woman or equating women negatively with nature or the profane (Levi Strauss 1971[1949], 1963[1958], 1969 [1964]; Ortner 1974; McCormack 1980). This is particularly the case when it comes to women of Colour. However, most actors in Cuban religiosity of African origin engage in knowing through kinaesthetic dimensions with regards to spiritual/religious practice in one way or another. And, in reference to the latter point, the body, and certainly the 'natural' world, are considered part and parcel of the spiritual within the relevant cosmologies (Bolívar 1997: 163-164). Not only is the natural world essential to *la religión*, I also observed my

interlocutors refer to associations with the 'natural' as indicative of both competency and spiritual efficacy. Knowing, in the ways listed above, is linked to experientially being an *espiritista.* Knowing *muertos*, in the sense of communicating with them, is arguably indistinguishable from being an *espiritista*. What one knows, and how, equates to who one is (Lambek 2015 [1993]:6).

Methodology

Cuba has a long trajectory of anthropology dating back to the early 20th century. Although Cuban anthropology, like anthropology in any place, is distinct from its counterparts elsewhere, I found that most of my interlocutors, if not all, knew what anthropology was. Further, there was a massive overlap between religious practitioners and Cuban anthropologists or researchers.[16] That being said, my presence was fairly unobtrusive. All my fieldnotes were taken by hand in a notebook and then typed up the following day. When I took notes most people were unfazed, aside from gentle, occasional teasing or shock that after so many months I was 'still studying'. In fact, my spiritual family (the family from the introductory vignette with whom I develop spiritually), encouraged me to take as many notes as I liked, as they wanted to help me with my studies.

Because of the nature of *la religión*, I did not involve myself in activities of *Espiritismo Cruzado* exclusively, though this thesis focuses on *Espiritismo Cruzado*. I was also active in *Santo*, *Palo*, and *Ifá*, or as active as possible given that I was not initiated in any of these religious traditions. Regarding *Santo*, I attended many *tambores*, *ibos* (sacrifices), (drumming activities for particular *orichas*), *cumpleaños* (anniversaries of initiation) and occurrences of *hacerse Santo* (initiating in Santo). With regards to *Palo,* I attended several *rayamientos* (initiations), *cumpleaños de prenda* (anniversaries of receiving a *prenda*), *consagraciones* (consecrations of

[16] I found this overlap to be more applicable for *babalawos* and *santeros* than *espiritistas* or *paleros*.

prendas). I also attended numerous *cajones*, the drumming activities held for *muertos*. Additionally, I took part in four weekly *escuelitas. Escuelitas* are meetings dedicated to learning components of religious practice or focusing on spiritual development, depending on the religious tradition. Three of these *escuelitas* were dedicated to work with *muertos*, or *Espiritismo Cruzado*. The fourth was dedicated to learning and interpreting *patakí* (sacred myths), pertaining to *Ifá* which complemented my analysis of the consultations I participated in and witnessed. Additionally, I often had long chats with *religiosos* without necessarily doing any actual spiritual or religious work. I found these conversations to be rich and valuable.

While I previously lived in Habana for 6 months in 2009, I conducted 16 months of consecutive fieldwork for this thesis: October 2015-January 2017. I made two follow up trips from May-June 2017 and again from May-June 2018, a cumulative 18 months of doctoral field research. I conducted all of my fieldwork in Spanish with any and all translations being my own unless otherwise specified. In the thesis I have used pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality. I had a very good fieldwork experience full of the expected trials and tribulations but mostly experiences of love, warmth and friendship. This does not mean that my positive experience detracts from the everyday lived reality of geo-political, material precarity my interlocutors and many Cubans (especially Cubans of Colour and Black Cubans in particular) are facing. What I would also like to make explicit is that these strong relationships do not in any way eclipse the power dynamics of global economic privilege.

Allen writes '"the native" is not noble, insolent or merely a hapless victim, but rather an agent with a limited repertoire of action doing the best he or she can' (2011:187). Touching upon the idea of nobility and addressing the notion of doing one's best within a 'limited repertoire of action,' I want to emphasise that I do not intend to paint a romantic picture of the lives of my interlocutors. As Slocum rightly says— and as

rings true for me as well— of the risks of minimising differences as a Person of Colour in the field, there are 'important differences between myself (a North American academic) and the women [and men] I studied [alongside] (working-class Caribbeans)' (2001: 139). And while my thesis inevitably addresses the way practitioners face hardships and struggles, I stress this is not in any way an indictment of the Cuban Communist Party.

Location

So much of my project is about Cubanness and its meanings, and yet this thesis is also very distinct to Habana. My fieldwork was conducted in several municipalities, primarily: Centro Habana, Plaza, Habana Vieja, San Miguel de Padrón, Mariano, Playa, Regla, Cotorro, Cerro, Diez de Octubre. That being said, within these municipalities the majority of my work was done in the neighbourhoods of Cayo Hueso and Dragones (Centro Habana) and Luyano and Lawtown (Diez de Octubre). I stress this work as being Habana-specific due to the legitimate frustration Cuban anthropologists have with non-Cuban researchers' discussions of *la religión* in Cuba as if it were not different from region to region of the country, province to province, city to city, municipality to municipality, and neighbourhood to neighbourhood.[17] Further, *Espiritismo Cruzado* is very particular to Habana and *el Occidente* (the western side of the island). In *el Oriente* (the eastern side of the island), *Espiritismo* is prominently that of *Cordón*; in *el Oriente* what is called *Espiritismo Cruzado* for the purposes of this thesis is sometimes known as *muertería*.

Demographics

'Entre el blanco pobre y el negro pobre, el negro es más pobre todavía.'

[17] I thank my colleagues at *el institutito cubano de antropología* (Cuban Institute of Anthropology) (ICAN) for this insight.

An interlocutor of mine once said the above to me during a conversation about race: 'Between the poor White man and the poor Black man, the Black man is poorer still.' He was paraphrasing from one of the foremost scholars of race in Cuba, Esteban Morales Domínguez. It was not uncommon for *religiosos* to cite public intellectuals in this way. We were discussing the racial politics of Cuba and he shared the quote after having said that racism in Cuba has not existed since the revolution. He claimed that institutionalised racism was eradicated with the revolution, whilst racial discrimination and prejudices remained very much present on the inter-personal, social level. The post-revolution class positions of Cubans are complicated as well.

I observed class dynamics on primarily two axes: amount of money one has access to and '*nivel cultural'* ('cultural level'). The majority of my interlocutors have limited access to money, and the few who do have greater access are typically *babalawos* or *santeros,* and to a lesser extent *paleros,* who have *ahijados* (godchildren) abroad (typically Mexico, U.S. [New York and Florida in particular], or Spain/Canary Islands). Those who practice *Espiritismo Cruzado* alone do not have *ahijados* and are mostly outside of these networks. It seemed to me that remittances from family abroad are the most common way of accessing money for Cubans. However, while a number of my interlocutors did have some family abroad, they told me that their families' conditions were also economically precarious and that they had little surplus income to send back.[18] The second axis of class, '*nivel cultural,'* refers typically refers to education. Those who have degrees are considered '*personas con cultural'* or *'con nivel cultural'* (cultured, refined). Those who have not gone to secondary school (and to a lesser extent university) are

[18] Most of my interlocutors who had family abroad had family who emigrated in the 1980s or after the Special Period. Typically, Cubans who emigrated in the late 1950s, early 1960s, fleeing the communist government, were well-off Cubans who now make up most of the White Cuban population of Miami—Cuban-Americans. Cubans of Colour who left in the 80s and after often met economic hardships as immigrants to their new countries of residence.

considered '*gente que no son estudiada*' / '*sin nivel cultura*' (uncultured). Most of my interlocutors graduated from either a technical post-secondary school or went to university.

There are three official racial categories in Cuba: *Blanco* (White), *Negro* (Black), and *Mulato. Mulato* refers to a wide assortment of different phenotypic markers. *Mulato* as a concept in the Cuban racial taxonomy encompasses multiple shades. Many people who might be designated as Black in Euro-American racial models fall under the category of *Mulato* in Cuba, again without necessarily referencing any direct mixed-race parentage. Chapter one will expand further on the way Cuban racial categories refer to contextual phenotypical identifiers, not individual's identifications or ancestry. While there are three official racial classifications, practically speaking I encountered over 18 different colour/racial categories in everyday life. The majority of my interlocutors were Black or *Mulato*, primarily falling under the quotidian categorisations of *Prieto, Negro,* or *Mulato.*

The vast majority of *espiritistas* I worked with were women. They ranged in age from 26-87. I also worked with *babalawos*, with the racial demographics being the same as above apart from two who are *trigueño* (wheat coloured) and/or *Mulato claro.* Their ages ranged from 21-79. And finally, I worked with *paleros,* ages 25-81, mostly men but several women as well. Of these *paleros*, one was White. I had interactions with 3 White *espiritistas* (all women). I do not mention the demographics of my interlocutors who are *santeros* because I did not work with any *santeros* who did not practice one of the other religious traditions just mentioned.

Your Spirits Brought You Here

I was told on more than one occasion that a relationship to *Espiritismo Cruzado* was in *camino* (my spiritual/religious path). This, it reasoned, was why I would end up focusing of *Espiritismo Cruzado* as the central

point of my research rather than another practice in *la religión*. One *espiritista* synthesised the comments: '*Tus muertos te llevaron a esto, lo tuyo es espiritual*.' ('Your spirits brought you to this [*Espiritismo Cruzado*], the spiritual is your forte.')

Some of my interlocutors are dead (cf. Turner 1993; Bubandt 2009). Having relationships with spirits (*muertos*, *orichas, mpungos)* is commonplace for *religiosos*. As such, my fieldwork had to take this on as a methodological—if not ontological—reality. For my interlocutors, the existence of spirits is a provable fact and without taking that seriously this research could not have been conducted. The ontological status of spirits is not the concern of my thesis, and in order to examine my own questions, the starting point for engaging the thesis is accepting that (at the very least) spirits have concrete effects in the world.

Pre-fieldwork, my original project was concerned with gender in *Palo*, particularly but not exclusively with the way women chart their religiosity within the hypermasculinely coded practice. Yet when speaking to *religiosos* I was met with many comments about *Espiritismo Cruzado*. When I spoke about gender, unless qualifying my interest as about men and women, most assumed I meant the latter. Some told me that, if I was interested in studying women, I would be better off studying *Espiritismo*. There were some *religiosos* who professed the gender associations carried by practices were arbitrary, outdated or problematic, but even those *religiosos* spoke about the importance of these enduring codings in the popular imaginary, even if they wanted me to know they did not subscribe to them. My research's shift into a more relational examination of religiosity with a focus on *Espiritismo Cruzado* connects to my original project as it maintains a focus on processes of gendering and racializing religious traditions. And as I elaborate on in chapter two, the interwoven character of *la religión* necessitates that practices be examined in conversation with one another.

Large chunks of chapter two will further the conversation about the (racialised and gendered) meanings imbued into specific practices and *la religión* more broadly. My spiritual development directly contributed to my research methods. Cultivating my practice and developing my relationships with spirits was a crucial part of my everyday life in the field. My spiritual development is something that continues even now. Spiritual development should not be understood as an initiation into *Espiritismo Cruzado* as one might initiate into *Santo* or *Palo*. While some urged me to consider initiating into those religious traditions, at the time I maintained that I did not want to. I had several reservations about this, one of them being because I did not want to have a utilitarian relationship to *la religión* (although I came to realise its very function is helping you fulfil needs). As such there were parts of *Santo* and *Palo* practice that I was not privy to. *Espiritismo Cruzado*, as it was in my *camino*, had no such restrictions, especially as interlocutors recognised me to have the *don* (gift) for working with *muertos*, and I was able to participate fully in practice. I had a *misa de investigación* wherein I got to know the prescriptions and prohibitions I ought to adhere to and became familiar or gained *conocimiento* (knowledge) of some of my *muertos* that had not organically presented themselves in practice. My spiritual practice is one among several factors that impacted my positionality in the field. Below I expand on some other components of my identity that shaped this research.

Positionality

¿Has visto la mujer nueva de Fernando? ¡Es jovencita, jovencita—parece que tiene trece años! ¡Seguro es una oriental buscando donde quedar en La Habana!

The above—'Have you seen Fernando's new wife?[19] She is so young, really young—she looks like she is thirteen! She is probably from *el Oriente*

[19] As I expound upon in chapter three, serious partners refer to one another as 'husband' and 'wife' (like wider notions of Caribbean common-law marriage), despite legal status.

(eastern provinces), looking for a place to live in Habana!'—was a piece of *chisme* (gossip) told about me when I first began a relationship with my partner. It was said by my partner's elderly aunt, *'la chismosa'* (the gossip), who due to diabetes complications was housebound. By this time in my research, people in the *barrio* (neighbourhood) of Cayo Hueso knew me well and found it amusing that she had made this assumption about me. When the gossip got back round to me, my friend said, 'And Aly, I just listened quietly, but I was laughing inside, thinking "If you only knew she is foreign!"' This example reflects the influx of migration flowing from east to west that has increased steadily since the Special Period of economic crisis as '*orientales*' chances of earning their livelihood are greater in the capital city. It also crucially demonstrates the different factors that situated me as an ethnographer during my fieldwork. It illustrates that some things that set me apart from my interlocutors are less visible than others.

Many ethnographers—let us not forget Malinowski's call for us to 'imagine ourselves suddenly set down'—begin their texts with an arrival story of some kind. Putting aside the question of 'anthropology at home,' there are some contexts in which one's arrival story is anticlimactic. I do not have an arrival story for when I came to the field. On one hand, I had friendships and networks already built in Habana, which made me feel like I was not a total newcomer. On the other, no one really noticed me. I mean this in the sense of the way I look. At first glance, I do not necessarily look out of place in Cuba. And when my accent shifted, I sounded less out of place as well. In terms of the way I talked, my accent changed over time. In the first three months I maintained a mish-mash accent of Mexican/Spanish/Argentine. This eventually moulded into an entirely Cuban, and Habana specific accent over time.

Like everyone else, the relationship between aspects of my identity and my anthropological praxis are linked. That is, in addition to parts of my identity forming a view from '[my] body,' situating me and my knowledge, (Harraway 1988) they opened doors. Being South Asian, first generation

Indian-American, Bengali, Hindu and a woman all contribute to my positionality as a researcher. These qualities also contributed to my ability to 'gain access' with many of my interlocutors. My age (either perceived or actual) played a crucial role. I was cast as a young woman who, while foreign (at first), was decidedly not a tourist, but rather a *científica* or *investigadora* (social scientist or researcher), and then eventually I was just 'Aly' or '*La India*.' At times I was cast according to romantic Orientalist notions of South Asian, Indian, and Hindu. Some of my interlocutors often told me I could understand *la religión* better being Hindu, because I had a 'natural' spirituality.

And like some other anthropologists of Colour coming from the Global North have commented, in my personal experience 'I maneuvered with greater ease and in a less obtrusive way than I did in many U.S. settings [and UK ones]. Paradoxically, I seemed to have access to more venues than usual' (Slocum 2001: 134). Partially stemming from essentialist notions of gender that my interlocutors held, my gender, in addition to my age and racial identity, often appeared to trump my nationality and resulting global economic privilege. Often people did not believe I was North American; they guessed that I was Latina and, when finding out my story, declared me to be Indian, not *really* American. That being said, one of the most relevant binaries to Cubans—and there are many—seemed to be that of foreigner/Cuban (Beliso-De Jesús 2015). The delineation of foreigner and Cuban is based on either perceived or actual differences in ways of being in the world. Foreigners are framed as having an entirely different reality to that of Cubans, what people refer to as *vivir a lo Cubano* (living like a Cuban).

As mentioned, during my fieldwork I lived in Cayo Hueso, a neighbourhood in Centro Habana, first with a young couple and their eight-year-old son. This couple ran a *casa particular*, meaning they dedicated themselves to renting a room in their flat with a permit from the government. I worked out a student deal that was a third of their

typical price, as it would save them the hassle of having tourists in their home and a constant revolving door of different guests. After a couple months, due to home repairs but also in order to be able to charge tourists full price, the man offered to move me to his mother's house. I had met his parents on a few occasions and got on well with them. I was told it would a much better environment for someone like me, a person who was not there for tourism.

I moved in with his parents and lived with them as a surrogate daughter for the rest of my fieldwork, shifting my relationship to the field. They became my field-parents and we have a strong relationship. I am particularly close to my host mother, whom I mention at a couple of points in the thesis. Living with them contributed to the idea of living *a lo Cubano* and, although I would classify them as a family of relative means (also contextually White), there are certain idiosyncrasies of the everyday in Habana: power-outages and lack of water are the primary ones. I became habituated quickly. When positioning myself in casual conversation as '*extranjera'* (foreigner), I was rebuked by my Cuban family and friends who rejected the title on my behalf.

They offered different responses like, '*Ya eres cubana ya'* (You are already Cuban now); '*Tú echas agua a la taza igual*,' (You flush the toilet the same as us [referring to flushing via buckets of water]); '*Tú eres cubana—aparte de la carne puerco'* (You are Cuban—except for not eating [pork] meat); or '*¿Tú? ¡Tú eres más cubana que nosotros!'* (You? You are more Cuban than us!) Living *a lo cubano* mirrors the notion that Cubans stop being properly Cuban if they emigrate, especially *Cubanos Americanos* (Cuban-Americans). Yet it is important not to conflate these sentiments of belonging with the material realities of the privilege I hold. I recall lamenting my departure on one occasion before leaving Habana. 'I do not want to leave!' I told a group of interlocutors and dear friends.

'Then give me your ticket,' a friend replied jokingly. In this joke however, there is a stark reality that exists for most Cubans I know. They will likely not have opportunity to leave the island. While many people are not able to travel, for my interlocutors this is not due to lack of financial resources alone but is also about not having the legal right to leave the country. This makes the binary of Cuba/*afuera* (outside of Cuba) and by extension Cubans/*extranjeros* (foreigners), as mentioned above, a crucial difference that ought not be overlooked. This occasion indicates that despite having a strong sense of belonging and fitting in, privilege of my nationality and ultimately foreignness is ever present.

My personal codings were gendered as a young woman and I fluctuated between several racial categories: *trigueña* (wheat coloured*), Árabe, China, India, Hindú, and Mulata.* I was most commonly read as a *Mulatica con características árabes (*a *Mulata* with 'Arab' characteristics). It is also worth noting that my racial coding and their fluctuations reflect the mutuablity of race and its taxonomies. As someone who is ethnically Bengali and racially South Asian, I am still often coded as *Mulata*. At the same time, this kind of flexibility between racial categories is reflective of light-skinned privilege that dark-skinned Black folks do not have. For example, Jafari Allen (2011:22-23) notes that as a dark-skinned Black man he fit in as well—so much so that at times found himself under police surveillance during his fieldwork in Habana (see also Sawyer 2005; Roland 2011). This profiling points directly to the limits of rhetorics of hybridity and racial fluidity that will be discussed at different points of the thesis. On the opposite end of the power spectrum regarding lack of mutability, White foreigners often fit squarely into one category, perhaps two (*Blanco*, *rubio* [blonde]).

Once people knew I was Indian, they often expressed their love of Bollywood to me and their affinity for Indian culture (song and dance). The party regularly showed Bollywood films on television (every Friday, once in the evening and again later in the night). Some *religiosos* had

knowledge of Hinduism and enjoyed discussing syncretic relationships between Hindu deities and either Yoruban or Congo ones. As mentioned above, though I was not categorised as '*Yuma*' (the often times disparaging term for North Americans, which is sometimes used to refer to foreigners from any country), I frequently described myself as Indian but born and raised in '*Yuma'*, as my own tongue in cheek explanation of my background. Cubans I know enjoyed this, citing my response as further cementing my belonging—'*Ya sabe que el cubano le gusta el bonche; Aly tú eres tremenda jodedora*.' (She knows that Cubans love joking around; Aly you are such a kidder.)

Chapter by Chapter Summary

The following chapters are dedicated to understanding the complex constellations of experience that make up my interlocutors' religiosity. These chapters seek to explore the research questions of how any why *Espiritismo Cruzado* is gendered feminine; how this relates to Cuban specific concepts of race and gender; and how practitioners navigate the difficulties of getting by in contemporary Habana. In doing so, each chapter showcases dynamics of mixing in my interlocutors' religiosity, dynamics that occur in relation to the thesis' wider themes of mothers, trance, and knowledge production. The chapters elucidate how others, spirits and fellow practitioners alike, are crucial to an *espiritista*'s practice. Further, each chapter intends to address the way gendering and racializing are hugely impactful both in and to *Espiritismo Cruzado* practice. Across all chapters there is an underlying argument being made that my interlocutors' experiences matter, that in and of themselves, the stories and the spiritual practice they shared with me merit some kind of acknowledgment. It is not only an attempt at (re)valuing mothering, but in particular valuing mothering done by Black and *Mulata* women who are recognised as religious and spiritual protagonists.

In chapter one I begin by examining what it means to be Cuban and *criollo* (creole), laying the foundation for the importance of mixture as a relevant motif to the thesis. I chart historical moments from colonial rule to independence to the revolution and the Special Period. I do this to demonstrate how throughout history there have been rhetorics of mixture that are at once transformative and liberatory but also limiting and reductive. Further, I provide a historical context in order to locate particular traits that are associated with Cubanness, such as rebelliousness, resilience and savvy. I lay the foundation for how *muertos*' racialised and gendered identities come to interact with *religiosos*' experiences. I address how the Cuban historical trajectory sits in direct conversation with religious practice and relevant spiritual actors. I demonstrate how different *muertos* reflect back on historical moments and how they exist within schemas of race and gender alongside living practitioners.

Chapter two builds on chapter one in setting the scene of the Cuban context and illustrating mixture. Following from the relationships between rebelliousness and resilience and Cubanness that I introduced in chapter one, I show how these qualities come to sit in dialogue with *la religión*. I demonstrate that because *la religión* is a matrix, *Espiritismo Cruzado* cannot be understood in isolation from other religious traditions. I provide an outline of some relevant practices and how they are situated in relation to one another. This chapter explores tensions and concerns that in part locate this thesis in wider debates and literature, but also add texture to how my interlocutors experience and relate to their religiosity. I pay attention to how different traditions are gendered and racially coded because much of the thesis interrogates how these codings impact practitioners' navigation of *Espiritismo Cruzado* practice and by extension their daily lives.

Chapter three is about family. In chapter three I explore some of the factors related to *Espiritismo Cruzado*'s gendered codings. I discuss how

interlocutors designated *Espiritismo Cruzado* as being rooted in a natural, innate gift over ritual initiation, something they framed as setting it apart from other relevant religious traditions. By discussing family, I am able to shift away from this dichotomous framework to more fluid, experiential processes of spiritual development. Examining family highlights the way practice engages intergenerational, biological family. Further, this chapter expands upon the taken for granted notion that roots *espiritista*-as-woman's spiritual faculties in procreative capacities. I draw attention to how a supposed universal ability to bear children extends to women being tasked with the majority of the responsibility of reproducing, caring for and acculturating children once they have been born. I explore these dynamics because I suggest they parallel *Espiritismo Cruzado* practice. Reproduction as an analytic leads me to argue for the following analogy: the gift is to pregnancy as spiritual development is to mothering.

Chapter four takes what has been established in chapter three, particularly regarding notions of spiritual development, and elaborates on *escuelitas* as spaces dedicated to that process. I illustrate the intimate and informal setting of *escuelitas* to highlight how they contribute to the styles of relating between practitioners. I argue that within spaces of *escuelitas*, events that occur within mundane, naturalised routines, *espiritistas* work together to communicate with spirits and in doing so engage in collaborative, embodied knowledge production. I show how roles shift and authority is fluidly distributed amongst *espiritistas* to relate the collaborative nature of *Espiritismo Cruzado* expression. Through the communal, somatic, highly emotional and sensual nature of this knowledge production, *espiritistas* are able to significantly witness and recognise each other in their practice. I underline how through spirits' communications, practitioners are provided with programs for action that help them manage spiritual practice and material precarity that they confront on a daily basis. All of these factors add up to *escuelitas* as everyday spaces of community and support.

Chapter five describes the drumming activity of a *cajón*. The *cajón*, a sort of celebration or party held for *muertos*, builds from chapter four's discussion of collaborative, embodied knowledge production. While chapter four examined how *escuelitas* allow for *espiritistas* to spiritually develop alongside *inventando, luchando*, and *resolviendo* (all synonymous with 'making do'), chapter five addresses what *muertos* want. When guiding, advising, and helping their *caballos* (*espiritistas;* literally 'horses'), *muertos* are able to contribute to their own spiritual progression. Yet when *muertos* mount *espiritistas* they not only benefit spiritually, they also have the opportunity to be in a body and experience sensual pleasures. This chapter examines how *muertos* want to be embodied through trance. While practitioners come together for a *cajón* to sing, dance, and drink, and as a result produce knowledge and foster community, above all, the *cajón* is an effort to provide *muertos* with the opportunity to materialise.

Chapter six focuses on two practitioners and their relationships to their *muertos principales*. While there is often rhetoric of people being 'made up' of their spirits, this chapter sheds light on the ways conflicts and tensions can arise between *espiritista* and *muerto*. In doing this, this chapter addresses two parallel points. One, that relationships between practitioner and *muerto* are not as straightforward as narratives might present. Secondly, by examining the conflicts that arise, I am also able to address the actual concerns of my interlocutors – a crucial aim of this thesis. For the two practitioners I describe, a woman and man, their insecurities relate to a failure to live up to gendered scripts. While the woman is concerned about being ugly, pointing to racialised beauty norms, she is not fulfilling ideals of a womanly body. The man has insecurities about what passing a hyper-feminine *gitana* spirit might mean for his sexuality and gender, as passing his *gitana* means not living up to contextual scripts of masculinity. This chapter examines dissonances in *muerto/espiritista* relationships while also speaking to the everyday issues that my interlocutors grapple with.

Following from the insecurities regarding trance, gender, race, and sexuality for men that chapter six interrogated, chapter seven continues this conversation with a focus on a differently located *religioso*. In this chapter, I look at how particular identities seemingly safeguard against the feminising of *Espiritismo Cruzado* in general and passing spirits in trance in particular. In this chapter, I examine the lines between femininity and masculinity alongside the lines between the religious traditions of *Espiritismo Cruzado* and *Palo*. Both practices have strong codings associated with them. I look at how the Black masculinity associated with *Palo* practice and *Congo* spirits affords particular actors more space to navigate the murky boundaries that interlocutors claim to be at once relevant and erroneous. In elucidating such dynamics, paradigms of mixture, ambiguity and elasticity are once again brought to the fore.

Chapter One: *Somos Criollos* (We are Creole)

I sat on the sofa with my mother watching an interview with reggaetón group *Gente de Zona* (people from the zone, signifying Habana, in particular their home district of Alamar; see figure 1). The interviewer was commenting on how the duo, despite their fame outside of Cuba, had remained '*criollo*.' I more or less knew what the word meant, 'creole' in all of its mixedness and complexity. But I asked my mother what it meant exactly, used in this way. I had heard '*criollo'* in contexts like this before and wanted to clarify.

Figure 1: Popular reggaetón group Gente de Zona (Photo credit to Carlos Figueroa, accessed 16th November 2018)

Was it just that the two had stayed down to earth, not letting success get to their heads? My mother knew them personally, as her son used to play trumpet with one of the members. She explained to me that it was more than that. 'No, *niña*, not just that, *criollo* means they are very Cuban, still. They might get to travel, but they have not forgotten who they are. They have money now, but they have not forgotten where they come from. They still know *la lucha* (the struggle) at the heart of being Cuban, they are loyal to their roots, to their rhythm. Oh, how I love those *Mulaticos*.'

She then added, knowing of my interest in *la religión*, 'and look at their *collares…*[20]'

Introduction

For my interlocutors, *criollo* (creole) is a synonym for Cuban. In the vignette concerning *Gente de Zona* above, being Cuban meant knowing the struggle and staying true to who you are. Without my mother expressly saying so, her words also reflected notions of being *criollo/*Cuban connoting racialised identities ('Oh, how I love those *Mulaticos')* and *la religión,* indexed by their *collares* (religious necklaces). And in '*luchar,*' *criollo* references notions of resilience and fruitfulness, reflecting how the ability to get by in a struggle is associated with Cubanness (Palmié 2013: 98; Stewart 1999: 45).

I explore the processes by which my interlocutors, primarily Black and some *Mulato* practitioners, who were historically understood as categorically not Cuban for a large chunk of the nation's history, have come to understand their racial identities as characteristic of Cubanness. I chart a historical trajectory that relates to my interlocutors' understanding of their religiosity. I choose this format to present the relevant Cuban history because, to borrow from Palmié, 'the historical imagination is, not a mere deposit of past social experience, but a repository of ways of engaging the present' (2002: 14). I begin with a brief unpacking of what can be meant by 'Cubanness.' I continue with a discussion of spirits as archetypes of historical figures. By laying out these categories of spirits, I am able to introduce some of the ways in which religiosity, gender and race are understood and fit together through these archetypes of Cuban history.

[20] *Collares* are necklaces that indicate a *religioso*'s *oricha*. Note, in the photo above, they are not wearing *collares*.

Cuba was inhabited by indigenous groups, primarily the Siboney and Taíno in pre-Colombian times.[21] With conquest in 1492, colonial forces exterminated the majority of the indigenous population before bringing enslaved Africans from Western Central Africa in the early 1500s. After the Haitian revolution and sugar boom of the late 18th century, there was an increase in the transport of enslaved Africans, this time from Western Africa. By 1868, Cubans began a long process of fighting for independence, finally 'winning' it in 1898. However, during the first half of the 20th century, Cuba was a 'republic' under the indirect rule of the U.S., before the revolution of 1959. While Cuba has maintained a single-party communist state, they have faced particular challenges since the fall of the Soviet Bloc. The fall of the Soviet Union resulted in extreme economic precarity for Cuba. This historical moment is referred to as the 'Special Period,' a financial crisis from which most of my interlocutors are still recovering.

Inherent to Cuban history has been a mixing that, both socially and biologically, produced a Cuban people. I understand creolisation—and by extension Cubanness—as a process of mixture rather than a synthesis between discreet objects. There have been debates regarding creolisation as a 'now you see it now you don't' phenomena (Palmié 2010); such conversations interrogate whether or not processes of creolisation are now recognised in various globalised geo-political contexts due to the intellectual tools at hand versus the idea that creolisation is a phenomenon unique to particular places and their histories (Palmié 2006a). In the case of Cuba, a post-plantation site of the Caribbean, and indeed for Cubans, as Palmié posits, terms like '*criollo*' 'serve[s] as an immediate significant predicate (whether imposed or self-selected) of selfhood and social practice for close to half a millennium' (2006a: 435).

[21] 'Siboney' is sometimes spelled 'Ciboney.'

I introduce the ways in which my interlocutors understood themselves as Cubans. I emphasise that this chapter does not serve as a straightforward historical overview but demonstrates the way the Cuban historical trajectory resonates with practitioners (cf. Lambek 2002[1999]; cf. White 2000). History as presented here, and as it relates to the wider thesis, addresses the meanings and values *religiosos* imbue Cubanness with and how it co-constitutes their religiosity. A historical understanding of *la religión* is essential, because as Palmié suggests, it is an eminently historical craft (2002:13). I obviously do not rest upon Cubanness as any singular, measurable or discrete essence. However, *ser criollo* (being creole and thus Cuban) began to unfold ethnographically as something very important in conversations with practitioners. I am not attempting to outline historical events in their entirety so much as present some influential moments relevant to the thesis. The practices that are involved in *la religión* emerge from Cuba's unique historical positionality and continue to thrive and change contemporarily.

In the introduction, I mentioned *ajiaco*, a **thick stew** used as a metaphor for Cubanness. Ortiz characterises the process of cooking this stew, not the stew itself, as the processual, continually in-flux, mixed nature of Cubanness (1940: 166). He attributes *ajiaco* to the Taíno, claiming their *ajiaco* pot was never-ending, that each day new things were added. The pot was not cleaned in order to retain its flavour; instead, so his story goes, more spices were added to mask any rotting. Cuba as the *ajiaco* of his time, Ortiz suggested, was more hygienic, but just as tasty (1940: 165).

For Ortiz, the *ajiaco* analogy could be used to examine the population, the language, and of course, Cuba's religiosity. Just as Hall characterises diaspora identities as 'constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference' (1994:235), Ortiz mentions the different ingredients used in *ajiaco* over the course of Cuba's history. Indigenous communities used ingredients like corn, potatoes, yucca and

meats like turtles, iguanas, crocodiles and others that were 'no longer palatable' (ibid). The Spanish brought pumpkin, beef, and pork. With the arrival of enslaved persons there were new starches like plantains. The Chinese provided different spices, and U.S. forces brought their standard, metal kitchenware. In all of these, Ortiz argued, there were new and diverse ingredients. The metaphor of the *ajiaco* is useful for understanding how some interlocutors did not comprehend *la religión* as a question of *criolla* versus *Africana* (Cuban versus African) but as African being incorporated into Cuban (see chapter two).

I elaborate on links between Cubanness and *la religión*. Cubanness, though one word in English, was broken down into two camps by Ortiz (1940): *Cubanidad* and *Cubanía*. *Cubanidad* is summarised as conditions that are unique to Cuban culture, typically demographic categories. *Cubanidad* thus refers to the specific, complicated quality of being Cuban (ibid 162). Ortiz outlines *Cubanidad* as a condition of the soul— a complex of sentiments, ideas and attitudes (ibid 164). *Cubanidad*, according to Ortiz, cannot be chosen; instead, it can come from birth, nationality, living on the island, or any kind of combination of the three. *Cubanidad* is there whether it embarrasses you or not, whether you want to reject it or not. *Cubanía*, on the other hand, is characterised as the active and precise will of being Cuban with aware, conscious identification, something in chapter two I suggest is exemplified in *la religión. Cubanía* is created and articulated as a spiritual condition, it is not straightforward or given. However, as I will illustrate, *Cubanidad* is not straightforward either.

The majority of my interlocutors were proud of being Cuban and, paradoxically, (or potentially not paradoxically) felt that being Cuban had cheated them out of what the world might have to offer. Holbraad frames this as a kind of sacrifice and suggests it is a paradox rooted in the 'political ontology of revolution' (2014) unique to Cubans. My interlocutors did not seem to relate to the idea of sacrifice; many

considered their pride in being Cuban as something apart from love for the revolution. Their relationship between Cubanness and the Cuban-nation state were not one and the same. Most were disillusioned with the party, even if they still believed in the ethos of the revolution.

Cubanness as I observed it, was experienced as both a pride in sense of self and community and the overcoming of obstacles rooted in geo-political problems felt to be outside of one's control. These aspects of Cubanness relate back to *la religión.* My interlocutors described to me how their enslaved African ancestors 'tricked' slave masters, allowing them to covertly practice their religious traditions. At the same time, there was discussion of the unique Cuban modes of religiosity as productively emerging from this dynamic as well. Overcoming obstacles in the form of *resolver* (resolving), *inventar* (inventing), and *luchar* (fighting) is traced back to ancestors' struggles. Histories inform the present-day religiosity of my interlocutors. This history is reflected through some of the spirits that *espiritistas* communicate with, who I characterise as historical archetypes in the Cuban popular imaginary.

Emblematic Figures in the National Imaginary

I wholeheartedly agree with Jafari Allen's critique that projects concerning particularly racialised, gendered, sexualised and/or classed Black Cubans must dedicate themselves to focusing 'on living, black subjects as complex, contemporary decision-making men and women rather than as reproduced folklorised "Afro-Cubans" rendered as objects with political and cultural myths' (2011:9). However, my ethnography shows that these contemporary decision-making men and women relate to folklorised categories and imaginaries in important and relevant ways. I discuss some of the emblematic figures in the Cuban popular social imaginary as they are relevant to *Espiritismo Cruzado.* Cultural configurations (Sahlins 1985) and political motivations (Apter and Derby 2010: xviii) of the pasts and presents inform these figures, who play crucial roles in Cuban

national consciousness and are 'reflected in religious identifications and subjectivities' (Beliso-De Jesús 2013:45). I examine how spirits, who are co-present (Beliso-De Jesús 2014; 2015b) in the world, hold particular identities and the way such identities relate to practitioners.

Each person has a *cuadro espiritual* (literally a 'spiritual picture'). One's *cuadro espiritual* consists of a diverse group of *muertos* who act in your favour—some work as guides, others are protectors, others carry out necessary spiritual works for you to help in daily life. All people have a *cuadro espiritual*, not just *espiritistas* or Cubans alone, yet it is through *espiritistas* that these spirits can be known. *Misas de investigación* are one way that allows for some of the *muertos* who accompany you to be identified.[22] Such *misas* also set up prescriptions and prohibitions catered to a person's individual spiritual trajectory. Emphasising spirits who are key to *cuadro espirituales* also emphasises how my interlocutors recognised mixing as intrinsic to their identities as practitioners of *la religión* and Cubans.

Among the categories of spirits who can make up a *cuadro espiritual,* are *Indios* (spirits of indigenous peoples), *Árabes* (vaguely Middle-Eastern, Arabic figures), *Chinos* (Chinese, identified particularly as Buddhist at times), *monjas* (nuns), and *Criollos* (Cuban born enslaved persons). Especially important to the thesis are the categories of *Congos* or *Africanos* and *gitanas* (gypsy spirits). Ideas of certain categories of spirits and the positions they hold in the Cuban popular imaginary are relevant to understanding navigations of *la religión.* These common categories of spirits serve as historical tropes.

One interlocutor told me that her *cuadro espiritual* was like a Cuban history book (see also Arguelles 2001:1; Viarnés 2010:322). The spirits

[22] There also exists a category of spirits called *muertos oscuros* (dark spirits), but they are mostly beyond the analytical scope of this thesis.

that she engaged with most often (or that engaged her most often) were *Indio*, *Congo Africano, monja* (nun), *Criollo*, *Chino*, and an *espíritu* '*intellectual'* ('intellectual' spirit). She said this diverse group of *muertos* traced Cuba's history:

> First the natives were here, and I have an *Indio*. Then the Spanish brought the slaves, and I have a *monja* and a *Conga*. Then we were born on the island itself, and I have a *Criollo*, then the *Chinos* were brought [referring to the migration of Chinese to serve as indentured labourers, especially in the sugar fields]. And then the revolution and all its craziness with the bourgeois, and I have an intellectual; he is very refined.

Again, among the most relevant to this thesis are the figures of *Congos/Africanos*. This category of spirit is called by a variety of names, commonly known as Francisca, Tomasa, Francisco, Tomás and José. While the aforementioned are all different names and each spirit is a unique person, they occupy a similar role in the social imaginary; that of Black, (hyper)masculine, ultra-spiritual and knowledgeable. As discussed at other points in the thesis, (hyper)masculinity is not limited to men. As Halberstrom suggests, 'lines of identification traverse the terrain of masculinity, dividing its power into complicated differentials of class, race, sexuality, and gender' (1998:2).

Africanos or *Congos*, are a category of spirit that were enslaved during life. Importantly—unlike *Criollos* (enslaved persons born in Cuba)—*Congos/Africanos* were born in Africa. As suggested above, their traits are divided by gender but have similarities across gendered lines. I was told that all *Congo* spirits were *paleros* during life. This religious/spiritual identity imbues *Congo* spirits with the same hypermasculinity coded onto living *paleros.* Due to their deadness, *Congos* have a kind of masculinity that is more potent still. This hypermasculinity can heighten the spiritual potency of practitioners and, I observed, enforce the masculinity of male *religiosos* (see chapter seven).

Like all categories of spirits, their deadness makes them particularly wise and experienced, suiting them to guide and protect—it is their deadness that gives them such authority and knowledge. *Africanos* are said to have a strong knowledge of *la religión* and working with them is necessary when initiating in certain practices, especially *Palo*. *Africanos* are the most common category of spirit I came across in my fieldwork, with most people having at least one in their *cuadro espiritual.* Many *muertos*, like *orichas* (deities or saints in the Yoruban derived religious tradition of *Santo* or *Ocha)*, occupy particularly gendered and racialised positions. *Muertos* sometimes directly correspond to *orichas* through an affinity. Such affinity is a *tendencia* (tendency) toward an *oricha* and his or her energy. These *tendencias* blur the boundaries between *muerto* and *oricha* (Viarnés 2010: 353).

Tendencies mark a kind of convergent energy. Spirits correspond to their own particular features or components, which distinguish them from each other. Franciscas*,* (or Tomasas) often also called Mama Francisca, are *Conga/Africana* spirits who often have a *tendencia* with *oricha* Yemayá*,* and her counterparts in *Palo, Madre Agua,* and Catholicism, the *Virgen de Regla*. Yemayá is an *oricha* most often depicted as dark-skinned Black. Francisca, like some have suggested of Yemayá, may be understood as a mammy-like caricature, especially given that Yemayá is 'the prototype for and deified paragon of maternal love' (Pérez 2013:9). At times, both Francisca and Yemayá are considered somewhat desexualised. At other times, like the mammy figure in the Cuban context, they are conceived as wanton in their appetites for men (ibid 17-18).

Yet scholars have taken issue with characterising Yemayá as a mammy archetype and instead configure her to be an icon of motherhood, who serves as a '"countermyth" to the colonial image of seductive and hypersexualised black women' (Viarnés 2010:321). The historical narratives that spirits invoke are important here, especially when recalling the relationship between Blackness and motherhood as outlined in the

introduction. As such, this situating of the Virgen de Regla/Yemayá/Madre Agua/Franciscas and Tomasas contributes to a positive and sacred likeness of dark-skinned Black women (Pérez 2013:19). The situating of spirits in particular roles demonstrates that both spirits and the living are part of national trajectories 'that entail gendered, racialised, ontological and historicized positionalities' (Wirtz 2014: 135).

Another key figure in many *cuadro espirituales* is the *gitana* (gypsy). Like *Africanos* there are a couple of common names for *gitanas* (Juliana, Justina, Jorgina etc.; see figure 2 for identifications of *gitanas* and *Africanas*). She is another example of a category of spirit who often corresponds to an *oricha*. The *gitana* frequently corresponds to the much discussed, (both by my interlocutors and academics) illustrative figure of the *Mulata* and the *oricha* Ochún.

Figure 2: Example of bóveda (spiritual altar), featuring material identifications of both Francisca and a gitana in the form of dolls

Gitanas are considered characteristic of a particular kind of hyper-femininity and are said to have an energy that corresponds with that of Ochún, the *oricha* of femininity, feminine sexuality, sweetness, and

freshwaters. The *gitana* as a hyperfeminine *Mulata* can accentuate female practitioners' femininity and, for some male practitioners, can present the threat of compromising heteromasculinity (see chapter six).

Muertos and *orichas* alike are coded into archetypical identities. Yet, narratives that are taken for granted are also complicated by practitioners. I recall chatting to a well-known *religioso* who told me that although the common idea is of Ochún as a *Mulata,* it cannot actually be true. He told me it may be true for her Catholic counterpart, La Virgen de la Caridad de Cobre, but it would be impossible for Ochún to be *Mulata*. This practitioner explained that *orichas* are divine ancestors from Africa (something that *religiosos* have a general consensus on) and given the historical understanding of race and phenotype in the Oyo Kingdom at the time, it reasoned that Ochún had to be Black.

Despite this kind of buried common-sense, however, Ochún has over time become *the Mulata*.[23] The conversation with this practitioner reveals that *religiosos* themselves add texture to supposedly fixed imaginaries, despite often subscribing to them. *Orichas* have several *caminos* (paths) or iterations of personality which practically undo the archetypical identities conferred onto them in the national popular imaginary. It has been argued that these 'rationalized microbiographies' (Pérez 2013:24) are part of a pantheonization of Yoruban derived religiosity and ongoing efforts to frame it as a 'world religion.' The nuances of Ochún/La Caridad de Cobre follow what Pérez has noted, far from spirits*/orichas* representing 'timeless, primordial essences,' (ibid ~~9~~) 'historical contingencies and culturally specific religious imaginaries have combined to produce the contemporary visions people have of them' (ibid). Pérez emphasises that these visions of spirits and/or *orichas* 'differ from place to place and according to the historical moment' (ibid).

[23] For more on Ochún/ La Caridad de Cobre see Murphy and Sanford 2001.

As Espirito Santo has written about at length, there is a link between selfhood and spirits (2012; 2013; 2015a; 2015b; 2015c), however, in this context rather than a pre-existing self, the self is understood as being in 'constant formation' (Espirito Santo 2012: 259). While spirits are persons in their own right, individuals are considered to be made up of their spirits—a kind of 'one but many' rhetoric that forms one's subjectivity. Espirito Santo writes that *muertos* 'cannot be disentangled ontologically from how people regard and experience their own constitutions, their "selves"' (2015a:39), and that 'spirits are both "inside and "outside"' of a person' (ibid). She goes on to say, 'inside because they are in and of one's body and mind, existing as one's character and emotions; outside because they have the capacity to intervene and effect changes' (ibid).

This dynamic of selfhood, especially the 'inside,' indicates how popularly imagined notions of 'gender and sexuality inform these communities' religiosity' (Otero and Falola 2013: xviii) (see chapters six and seven). While some *religiosos* swear by one's individualised, unique spiritual path in life over the mythobiographies or personalities that *orichas* have taken on in the popular imaginary,[24] often times 'in everyday religious interactions, practitioners situate their identities in relation to generalised characteristics of the deities, discernible in the way one acts, thinks, feels, and expresses him or herself as children of a specific deity' (Beliso-De Jesús 2013: 57). Underlying *Espiritismo Cruzado* is a selfhood that is 'permeable, contingent, and constituted through iterations or encounters, rather than integral, essentialized, and somehow "interior" of social,' (Wirtz 2014: 149-150).

[24] The *patakí* (sacred myths of Yoruban derived religiosity that *babalawos* are tasked with divining and interpreting) demonstrate several *caminos* (paths), of *orichas* that highlight their dynamic personalities and thus how they do not fit neatly into the paradigmatic models that supposedly represent them.

In short, as Otero lays out, 'one's body can inhabit several selves that are constructed in a broad range of ways in terms of gender, race, culture, and even time period' (2013: 96). One's *cuadro espiritual* and its effects on self and subjectivity mirror arguments that the Latinx gendered subject must be understood 'as always in flux and as signifying multiple realities that refer to the historical configurations of these subjects' (ibid 97). Bettelheim also suggests that 'people do not just copy traits [that correspond to these emblematic figures]: traits are acquired when they correspond with an ideology, a faith, or a personally developed belief system already in place' (2010:296). This complex interconnection between living and dead means that it is not just because there are these archetypical figures who correspond to particular ways of being in the world, but because these figures are spiritually conceived of as part of you, that people actively employ and negotiate the identities conferred both onto the figures and themselves. I have discussed some specific figures in the popular imagination that exemplify certain norms. I take on board worries of the reductive nature of archetypes but also follow Mahmood when she suggests that norms are both imposed onto people and make up their senses of self (cf. 2005:23).

I elaborate on these representations, which Kutzinski discusses as akin to mythic foundations of 'racialised and sexualized cultural icons' (1993:21), throughout the thesis to flesh out how they contribute to Cubans' representations of themselves. Putting these ideas into dialogue with religious traditions offers a foundation for how historically rooted stereotypic representations function practically. Below, I examine an understanding of Cuba's history as it relates to cultural resources or local codes that have constructed the representations of these emblematic figures. Keeping in mind Palmié's words, 'Cultural pasts—as well as futures—are never just a given, but must be produced, tended to, modified, defended, or contested in line with the options and constraints perceived within a historically constituted present felt to be in need of chartering' (2013:148). I follow him as well as Wirtz's outlining of

historical conscious as relevant to studies of *la religión*. Wirtz writes, it is key because it examines 'a community's sense of how its past has shaped the present' (2004:413). Rooting the thesis firmly in the Cuban context will allow for chapter two's discussion of *la religión* to be legible.

Cuba: Where Race, Religion, and Nation Are the Same?

Cuban nationhood is complexly racialised. Despite the phenotype of individual citizens, there is rhetoric of Cuba as a *Mulata* nation. Indeed, as Kutzinski writes *'mestizaje* [miscegenation] has been perhaps the principal signifier of Cuba's national cultural identity' (Kutzinski 1993:5), the so-called 'essence' of the nation (Benitez-Rojo 1992). *Mulatez* is not an innocent mixing, it was also a process of *blanqueamiento* (a strategic form of whitening the country). Fernandez's work on interracial romance in contemporary Cuba discusses how colonial forces encouraged certain types of interracial coupling as an impetus to whiten and thus modernise the nation and population (2010:3). To quote Stewart, these processes of creolisation or *mulatez* 'Draw[s] attention to the inequities of power that allowed European colonizers to discursively legislate the importance of "race," culture, and environment in determining where one fits along a chain of being, that placed the Old-World homeland and its subjects at the pinnacle' (1999:44).

Processes of *mulatez* were also labelled as '*adelantar la raza'* ('improving the race'). *Mulatez was* an enactment of the sexual politics of race (Stoler 1995: vii), producing racial categories through sexual practice (ibid 45). The hope was that the mixing of race through *blanqueamiento* (whitening) would produce a White(r) nation. Importantly, when unions between enslaved women and White citizens produced offspring, financial resources and potentially even freedom could be negotiated (Safa 2005). This historical record demonstrates how Cuban women of Colour have always been *luchando*, fighting, and especially struggling financially but also hustling in a productive sense.

This dark side of *ser criollo*—the whitening inhered in the (valorisation of) mixing— ends up marginalising Blackness. Cuban nationalism has long been rooted in this sense of *ser criollo*, which on one hand contributed to anticolonial and anti-imperial movements and on the other hand is suspect for its deployment of exclusionary strategies (cf. Gil 2018: 213). Rather than an expression of tolerance or inclusivity, *mulatez* as manifested in *blanqueamiento* was a means to an end (ibid 28). Some have labelled this project as no short of a Black holocaust intended to erase Blackness (Allen 2011: 48; Bronfman 2004: 148-149). Though, whitening the population failed insofar as such processes also involve blackening or darkening (Helg 1990; de la Fuente 1999:48). The violence embedded in the process of *mulatez* coalesces around the figure of the *Mulata*.

These processes—physical, sexual, emotional, and psychic (Fanon 1986 [1952])— amalgamate in the complicatedly valorised figure of the *Mulata* as seen in Cuba's patron saint, the Virgen de Caridad de Cobre (Ochún, Mama Chola) and the *gitana* archetype as mentioned previously. The *Mulata* body is significant in both how she is represented, (as sensual and beautiful) but also what she is used to represent (the Cuban nation and Cubanness). Of course, the idolisation of the figure of the *Mulata*, does not mean that she is free from subjugation.[25]

The legacy of valorising the *Mulata* could be said to continue in denigrating the *Negra* (Black woman). By extension, emphasis on the *Mulata* woman as the paradigmatic Cuban parallels the favouring of discussing a *Mulata* nation in the abstract over addressing the lived

[25] While serving as the symbol of sensuality and beauty in the current moment, *Mulata* (and *Mulato)* was historically a derogatory term. Aside from indexing unilinear racial classifications of progression (Blackness toward Whiteness), the word came from '*mula bruta'* (a brutish mule). The enslaved *mestizo* was not entirely an enslaved mule (i.e. Black) nor were they a 'good Spanish steed' (i.e. White) (Depestre Corcho 2011:207). *Mulatos* were somewhere in between.

realities of Black Cubans. Perhaps serving to obscure the way such heritage maps on to phenotype differently, Cubans across racial lines employ the common saying: '*Él que no tiene de Kongo, tiene de Carabalí*' (He who does not have Kongo [blood], has Carabalí [blood].) In using this phrase, claim is laid to African ancestry, demonstrating miscegenation as a key to both Cuban history and identity.

The processes of racial mixing that produce a saying as the one above are rooted in Cuba's history as a Spanish colony. Kutzinski suggests that a focus on a *Mulata* nation is often at the risk of an erasure of a Black mother figure (1993:169)—as it is 'the Black women's violated body where the two races meet' (ibid 168). Kutzinksi argues that often non-White women are not acknowledged as 'participants in and possible producers of the very culture that inscribes its identity through them' (ibid 167). Through *mulatez*, national and racial identities and selves were both created and blurred. If *mulatez* is at Cuba's core, very often Black women's sexually violated bodies were the site at which men battled for social control.

The involvement of race, gender and nation has always been indivisible. Black women's bodies created the nation. That is, if this mixing is the country's so-called essence, generally, sex (consensual or not) was only socially sanctioned between women of Colour and White men. The inverse was coded as a weakening and menacing dynamic (Martínez-Alier 1989:36; Fernandez 2010: 31).

For the preponderance of my interlocutors, *ser criollo* (being Cuban) meant being *de color* (a person of Colour) and being a *religioso.* These ideas of Cubanness relate race, *la religión* and nation as, if not one and the same, inextricable. In addition to the common refrain regarding Cubans having either Kongo or Carabalí blood, there was another that comes to mind: *El Cubano es creyente* (Cubans are believers). When I asked a friend what exactly it meant, 'Believer of what?' I inquired, she

told me that Cubans believed in 'whatever.' When pushed further she elaborated that Cubans as believers referenced practicing multiple religious traditions without them being in conflict.

While subsuming racial identity with national identity can still be seen as a problem for Black subjectivity in Cuba (Gilroy 1993:30), my interlocutors framed this process less as subsuming and more as conflating. Such a conflation goes beyond shallow imaginaries of Africa and the state's efforts to capitalise on its historical trajectory for tourist consumption—which I will describe below. It was apparent that a historically rooted concept of the Cuban nation interfaced with the racial identities and religious subjectivities of my interlocutors (Routon 2005; Gilroy 1993).

Colonialism

Primarily inhabited by Siboney and Taíno indigenous groups and used as a stopping point between present day North and South America for numerous others, Cuba's pre-Colombian history is certainly rich. Yet, with the exception of the *Indio* archetypical spirit, these historical moments were less discussed as relevant to my interlocutors' religiosity.[26] The absence is likely linked to the small present-day indigenous population of Cuba. Spanish colonial forces exterminated the preponderance of Cuba's inhabitants, mostly in the first 50 years (Fernandez 2010:2). While becoming a Spanish colony after Columbus' arrival to Cuba in 1492, Spain/Cuba's participation in chattel slavery lasted roughly from 1511-1886, approximately 375 years. From the early 1500s, the majority of enslaved people were brought from Western Central Africa, today what would be Angola, Gabon, and DRC. These were typically Kongo-Bantú peoples (Ortiz 1940). *Religiosos* seemed to agree that the arrival of these

[26] I was told that *Espiritismo de Cordón*, primarily a practice in *el Oriente* (eastern provinces), has more direct links to forms of indigenous religiosity, but this remains outside the scope of this study.

enslaved people marked the arrival of *Palo*—or at least an early iteration of *Palo* practice— and enslaved people's spirits.

Like in many other contexts, colonialism and plantation slavery in particular brought forth the foundations of not just *la religión*, but relatedly, Cuba's complex colour-coded system of racial taxonomy. Enslaved Africans, and later Cuban born enslaved persons (Black and eventually some *Mulato* as well) were the property of Spanish and later White Cuban born men. The bodies of enslaved people were bought and sold in markets, beginning the processes of coding Blackness with simultaneous savagery and desirability (Palmié 2002:165). The racial dynamics of *la religión* are informed by ideas of Blackness and Africanity (see Marquet 1972) which were shaped by the legacy of chattel slavery and colonialism. As is the case in contexts outside of Cuba, (Fanon 1986[1952]; Stoler 1995; White 1978) the legacy of colonialism and slavery's discourses of the simultaneity of 'savagery' and desirability continues. Common tropes of racism and romanticism, valorisation and denigration, occupy a special place in Cuba and can be recognised as paralleling valorisations of Africanness and strategic utilisations of Black abject power. This dynamic sits in dialogue with the idea of practitioners' enslaved ancestors as more authentically spiritual, coinciding with legacies of such racist romanticisation.

As Beliso-De Jesús suggests, *la religión* is a historical racial space, and it finds 'racialised and sexualized power of embodied self-awareness precisely in the experience of black abjection' (2014: 515). The imaginary of the maroon slave, which coincides with the previously described archetype of *palero/Congo*, is crucial to both Cuban nationhood and my interlocutors' religiosity. Maroons, proud rebels against colonial forces who sought sanctuary in the wild nature of Cuba, are foundational to national imaginaries. They speak to the idea of nature as providing and linked to spirituality, and of their religiosity as a mighty resource that is perceived as untouchable insofar as it withstand colonial rule. The

Africanness of enslaved ancestors serves as a source of primordial, authentic Cuban identity throughout the country's history (Wirtz 2014:99) for practitioners and the state alike, thus creating a foundation for 'a defiant nationalist spirit celebrated in a history of imagined Black rebelliousness' (Beliso-De Jesús 2013:49).

Cabildos are also crucial for tracing the relationship between religiosity and the trajectory of Cuba. From the beginning of the 1600s colonial authorities organised enslaved Africans, and by then their descendants, in institutions called '*cabildos de nación*,' with *nación* or nation referring to enslaved persons' 'self-expressed perceptions of common origin' (Palmié 2013:41). Though association was voluntary and *cabildos* offered support, their organising and keeping groups together can also be recognised as a means of control or pacification (ibid). Interlocutors told me the Spanish, in their infantilization (cf. Stoler 1995:141-150) of enslaved persons, failed to recognise their strength in community. Although each *cabildo* was under the tutelage of a Catholic saint, I was told this strength in community is what prevented a foisting of Catholicism upon them, despite Spanish colonial forces' better attempts [27] Rather than, as one practitioner put it, a kind of 'cosmological colonisation,' what resulted was a generative process of religiosity. This connection between notions of rebellion and *la religión* has come to be understood as indicative of Cubanness.

The Haitian revolution tremendously impacted Cuba. It sparked a fear in colonial forces and slave masters. As there was a Black majority on the island, there were fears that if enslaved peoples in Haiti could successfully rise up and become independent, then enslaved peoples in

[27] For further elaboration on *cabildos* see Fernández Olmos and Paravisini-Gerbert 2011:37.

Cuba could do the same[28] (Ferrer 1999: 2). Spanish colonial forces utilised this rhetoric by suggesting that if Cuba did not remain Spanish it would be in danger of mirroring Haiti and becoming African. Additionally, the depletion of the enslaved labour force as a result of Haitian independence, led to a sugar boom in Cuba that saw a new wave of enslaved peoples from Lucumí/ Yoruban speaking populations of West Africa, from countries such as present-day Nigeria, Benin, and Guinea. The populations of Yoruban speaking enslaved people are said to have brought their religious traditions of the *Reglas de Ocha* and *Ifá*.

Wars of Independence

In 1868, Carlos Manuel de Céspedes freed the enslaved people who worked his plantation, asking them to join him in arms against the Spanish and fight for Cuba's freedom (Ferrer 1999:15). Though perhaps a necessary political strategy more than anything else (de la Fuente 1999: 48-49), from its inception, abolition was conceived as intertwined with and essential for independence (Morales Domínguez 2013:56). Yet, Manuel de Céspedes did not abolish slavery; slavery was slowly, processually abolished over the 30-year period of Cuba's struggle for independence. Official abolition is dated at 7 October 1886 (Ferrer 1999: 95). Manuel de Cespedes' actions mark the beginning of the struggle for independence, and in particular its first stage in the 10 years war.

In Cuba, claims of a 'post-racial' state or 'raceless' nation have been staked since the late 19th century by these nationalist movements in order to rally support against the Spanish. Despite the lack of full citizenship for enslaved people, antiracist rhetoric was utilised to garner the participation of Cubans of Colour (Bronfman 2004:1). There was a politics

[28] This caused paranoia about enslaved people uprising which saw its pinnacle in the *Escaleras* conspiracy of 1843 in which a plantation owner claimed he had uncovered a plot of enslaved people to revolt.

of inclusion and inferiority occurring at the same time, a pattern seen throughout Cuba's historical trajectory. Thus, Cuba's rebel army heavily influenced the discourses of race in Cuba. The moment of the struggle for independence may be characterised as the point at which disjunctions, political and otherwise, laid the foundation for the 'myth of racial democracy' (de la Fuente 1999). The more rebel forces emphasised inter-racial cooperation and coalition, if not actual equality, the more Spanish forces labelled the rebellion as Black and dangerous. And, as seen in later times, political identities or claims making rooted in race were deemed unpatriotic and in defiance of 'national narratives of unity and harmony' (Bronfman 2004:4).

The Cuban rebel army posited that racism was a threat to Cuban independence (ibid 3). Yet there remained discrete distinctions between those involved in the wars of independence. There were (White) Cubans and the Spanish, and somewhere in between and separate were free Black and *Mulatos*. Ferrer describes the way rebels of Colour were characterised as the following: 'allies or pupils who though were now free, were not yet Cuban. The label "Cuban" was still often reserved at least implicitly, for the benevolent slaveholder willingly renouncing his property for the nation' (1999: 38).

In the banding together as Cubans against the Spanish, the differently experienced gradations of oppression were eclipsed. It is important to note the parallels between religiosity and the fight for independence. In both, there are a links between Blackness and rebellion, and a dangerousness and community that underlies it. And while there are contextually phenotypical White individuals involved, both can become coded as Black due to the associations and majority of participants.

However, rebels maintained the rhetoric that soldiers across racial lines became Cubans together. This fraternal and inherently masculine community points to war, as much as sex, being key in forging a *Mulata*

nation. In war, women were excluded from the symbolic birth of an independent Cuba apart from their capacity to produce Cuban patriots (Ferrer 1999: 127). Despite the rhetoric of Cubans of all colours as brothers in arms against a common Spanish enemy (which folds onto the supposed horizontal communities of brotherhood in nationalist rhetoric) there is documentation of women as crucial in this historical moment.

Up until the 1880s and their disbanding, women held authoritative roles in *cabildos*. Women were the founders of several *cabildos* and the religious communities that succeeded them in the early 20th century (Rubiera Castillo 2011:109). Black and *Mulata* women were essential participants in fighting for and building an independent Cuba, some taking up arms as *mambisas* fighting against Spain. Women served as and are generally recognised as agents of social change in Cuba's transitionary period from a colony to a nation-state between 1890s and 1910s (Helg 1995:2).

Republic

In January of 1898 the USS Maine exploded in Habana harbour prompting the U.S. to begin the Spanish/American war which they won later that year, and in doing so essentially won Cuba (Ferrer 1999: 196). As such, Cuba's transition from a Spanish colony to an independent republic was framed less as something fought for and earned, and more as something the U.S. 'granted' (ibid 189). The republic years, roughly the first 60 years of the 20th century, were a crucial point in forming many currently held popular cultural imaginaries and in understanding Cuba's current racial taxonomies, archetypes and general political climate. As de la Fuente writes, 'Spanish colonialism had been defeated by a cross-racial alliance in which Afro-Cubans were well represented as officers and soldiers, but the Republic was born under the direct, economic, political and ideological influence of the United States' (1999: 48-49).

The Treaty of Paris transferred Cuba from Spain's hands to the hands of the United States, with Cuba becoming an informal United States colony. The United States occupied Cuba from 1898-1902; however, the United States indirectly governed Cuba under the first Republic from 1902-1933 and the second which followed until the revolution in 1959 (Ferrer 1999; Wirtz 2014: 98-99), as the Platt Amendment gave the United States the right to intervene in all Cuban affairs. The influence of the U.S., principally with regards to conceptualisations of race, are relevant to the Cuban context. There are notable parallels and diversions, particularly with respect to the ideas of the politics of Blackness in the first half of the twentieth century (Bronfman 2004: 116).

Morales Domínguez, writes the following:

> Racial discrimination can be defined as the practice and exercise of racism implicit in racial prejudice, which is expressed in negative stereotypes of the other. In the case of Cuba, racism is the fruit and inheritance of the old cultural hegemon of Spanish colonialization, origination in slavery and reinforced by the practices of the neo-colonial Cuban Republic, which in some respects sought to emulate the racial discrimination in the United States (2013:91).

Yet there were also clashes between a racial binary that held for the U.S. and the more fluid dynamics of Cuba. In terms of discrimination, Black blood mattered little to Cubans (owing to the policies of *blanqueamiento* detailed above) unless it mapped on to physical features (Helg 1995: 93). With regards to the negative stereotypes as referenced by Morales Domínguez, Ortiz' *Los Negros Brujos* (1986 [1906]) bears mentioning. In *Los Negros Brujos,* Ortiz argued a relationship between Blackness and *la religión,* although the latter was categorised as *brujería* (witchcraft). Ortiz's early work contributed to gendered and racialised ideas of *la religión* as *brujería* and associated it with criminality in the popular Cuban imaginary.[29] In the Cuban context the Black *brujo*, a threatening

[29] Although the 1901 constitution guaranteed religious freedom, many *religiosos* were charged under the thin veil of 'sanitation regulations'

icon of fear and barbarism, was wrapped up in a trope seen across the Americas, the Black rapist (Davis 1981; Helg 1995:18). The gendered, sexualised and racialised trope of the Black *brujo* highlights the relationship between religiosity and sexuality, one that is further emphasised when dealing with Black and *Mulato* identities.

Two occurrences in particular exist in dialogue with the propaganda of the Black *brujo*. In 1904, a Black man, and alleged practitioner, was sentenced to death for the attempted rape and murder of a ten-year-old White girl. Shortly after, a ten-month baby girl was kidnapped and killed. Several Black men were accused of the murder which rumour, and the U.S. influenced media in particular, emphasised to be a ritual sacrifice (Helg 1995:109-114). Two years later in *Los Negros Brujos*, Ortiz's gendering of *la religión* as masculine, potent, and of the underworld indexed the practitioner as the dangerous, hypersexualised, powerful, Black, masculine *brujo* (witch) (Ortiz*:* 1986[1906]; see also Bronfman 2004:43).

Ortiz's characterisation is important. I found for non-practitioners '*brujería*' sometimes still held negative connotations and when it was used it was meant pejoratively; however, for *religiosos brujería* can at times be used as a synonym for *la religión.* Like Ortiz, my interlocutors conceptualised a link between race and religiosity. Indeed, this chapter is partly about demonstrating that link clearly to understand it in terms of longer histories. Yet unlike Ortiz's early assessment, my interlocutors associated their religiosity with an ethos of rebellion and support. Though I would not straightforwardly label practice of these religious traditions as resistance, Helg suggests that for the most part practitioners were privately able to successfully resist White repression and condemnation of *la religión* (1995:247). She writes, 'To them, attachment to a reconstructed African culture was not only a symbolic retreat against a

(Bronfman 2004: 24) due to *la religión*'s association with kidnapping, murder, and cannibalism.

racist society but also a dissident subculture that permitted collective self-affirmation' (ibid).

My interlocutors often saw a bi-directional, causal link between the level of spirituality one had and ancestry of enslaved Africans that, for my primarily Black and *Mulato* interlocutors, but not for all *religiosos*, also mapped onto racial phenotype. I observed a co-opting and flipping of previously discriminatory stereotypes into discourses that were more affirmative. Akin to ideas of Blackness equalling some kind of authenticity, Blackness indexed a superior spirituality.

In the year 1908, a political party called the *Partido Independiente de Color* (Independent Party of Colour) or PIC was formed. Members were primarily formerly enslaved veterans of Colour (Black and *Mulato*) from the wars of independence. They found themselves displaced and without opportunities or work after fighting for Cuba. The PIC represented the interests of Cubans of Colour in order to ensure that they were regarded as full, equal citizens, participating in government across the levels of the Republic. In addition to representation, they also had many platforms that were not race specific: an eight-hour work day, distribution of land for veterans, and concerns of mobility and immigration (Ferrer 1999: 63-64). The PIC firmly pledged allegiance to the Cuban nation and did not advocate racial separatism. Due to the platforms mentioned above, they easily garnered broad popular appeal from veterans (ibid 64).

Yet, in 1910, the Morúa Amendment was passed, prohibiting political parties composed of groups of individuals from a single race or colour (ibid 64-65; Helg 1995: 40). By this time dozens of members were imprisoned for a 'racist' conspiracy. The repression of the PIC rested also on the party's lack of legitimacy due to the previously mentioned myth of racial democracy. A raceless Cuba was incompatible with Black mobilisation (ibid 63). In 1912, there was an armed protest by thousands of former PIC party members to relegalise the party. They were massacred

by the Cuban army. This defeat left Cubans of Colour with virtually no space for political autonomy (Ferrer 1999, Helg 1995).

During the republic years, U.S. rule took a hard line on 'Afro-Cuban cultural expressions,' i.e. *la religión* (Helg 1995:107-108). As colonial forces generally saw religious tradition of enslaved folks and free Cubans of Colour as harmless, or evidence of their infantile nature, they did not regulate religious practices under Spanish penal code. During the republic years, this lack of regulations changed and *la religión* began to be legally persecuted as witchcraft (ibid).

However, in the 1920s, Cuba saw a cultural, literary, musical and aesthetic movement called *Afrocubanismo* (Afrocubanism). Helg writes:

> By the 1930s, an expurgated version of the counterculture and counterreligion transmitted by lower-class Afro-Cubans entered the mainstream. In other words, the black brujo had finally managed to influence the definition of the Cuban nation. Although Afro-Cubans had lost much of their strength and political power during the three decades following 1895, by the end of this period they had begun to be culturally recognized (ibid).

Paralleling movements like the Harlem Renaissance and interests in African art forms taking place in Paris and elsewhere (Helg 1995:247), *Afrocubanismo* marked the point at which Cubanness began to be associated with Cuba's African roots. Around this time, Ortiz's later work attempted to legitimise *la religión* and its practitioners, arguing for its ties to the roots of the nation (Ortiz 1924). *Afrocubanismo* set a precedent for non-White Cubans as valorised outside of their roles in the war of independence, as intellectuals, artists and writers. That being said, some have lodged the critique that *Afrocubanismo* problematically folklorised at the expense of obfuscating actual social problems and conflicts (Kutzinski 1993: 145).

Many Cuban intellectuals of Colour were in dialogue with anti-racist activists in the U.S.; Nicolas Guillén, Juan Marinello, and Gustavo Urrutia

were in conversation with W.E.B. DuBois and Langston Hughes (Kutzinski 1993:148), cementing what Sarduy and Stubbs refer to as the 'long-standing links [that] exist between African Americans and Afro-Cubans' (2000:33; see also Brock and Castañeda 1998). Both sets of intellectuals argued that political and economic circumstances of inequality allowed for discrimination and their respective republic's racial dynamics to continue, even if slavery had been the source of anti-Blackness (Sarduy and Stubbs 2000: 176).

One among them in particular was Salvador García Agüero. He argued that Cuba's degree of miscegenation had to be taken into account. Ideas of distinct, pure races were not useful and could do further harm in a nation of *mulatez*, with a distinct system organised around colour coding. Of course, systems of colour coding do not prevent discrimination; rather divisions are introduced as 'an insidious array of exclusionary practices based on slight difference in skin tone' (Bronfman 2004: 178) and other phenotypic features, particularly hair texture and nose shape.

Feminine Nation, Masculine Revolution

Cuba as a nation is gendered. Similar to many (post)colonial contexts, it may be coded as feminine in relation to a masculine colonial exploiter, highlighting complicated dynamics of racialisation and gendering (Stoler 1995; Wade 2003, 2009). One practitioner referred to Cuba as a woman who needs to be comfortable alone, the implication being without a heteromasculine partner. To paraphrase the comment, Cuba had always been defined by others: Spain, the U.S., then the Soviet Union. Cuba, according to this interlocutor, needed to be comfortable as 'single'.

Ortiz also referred to the Cuban nation as a woman. He wrote of Cuba-as-woman as a trinity of mother, wife and daughter. Like a mother, Cubans come from her. Like a wife, they give themselves to her. And like a

daughter, they watch over her[30] and will be survived by her (Ortiz 1940: 164). Femininity— insofar as being susceptible to penetration from outside forces (recall the thesis' introduction), like Spain and the U.S.— continues to influence Cubans' conceptualisation of Cuba.

If the Cuban nation is gendered as feminine, the project of the revolution, on the other hand, has been labelled as decidedly masculine (Allen 2011:62). Many of my interlocutors remember the revolution. One practitioner's comment synthesises complicated relationships between the revolution and *religiosos*, and especially *religiosos* of Colour: 'It did a lot of good, but the revolution was not for us Blacks.' Ironically, the revolution and party liken themselves to the runaway maroon escaping *his* master. Further, revolutionaries like Camilo Cienfuegos or Ché Guevara, both of whom are highly masculine figures (though arguably, neither of whom map onto the party's current agendas) are invoked as revolutionary icons.

The purported 'racial equality' (Ferrer 1999:3) of independence was considered deferred to the revolution. Yet the racial equality experienced for Cubans of Colour is characterised as more akin to 'inclusive ideologies of exclusion' (Stutzman 1981 as cited in Palmié 2013:159) or 'inclusionary discrimination' (Sawyer 2005). Cubans of Colour were framed as central to the nation-state, but their unique histories and contemporary lived experiences could not be rooted in a racial consciousness. Importantly, the revolution impacted the racial demographics of Cuba. Cubans who left at the outset of the revolution were majority White and well-off. Generally speaking, Cubans of Colour did not have opportunities to emigrate until the 1980s or after. Many of those that did emigrate later found themselves as immigrants in financially precarious situations. As such, financial remittances from

[30] Literal translation: her possess or own her.

family abroad are largely unavailable to Black and *Mulato* Cubans (Morales Domínguez 2013:68).

The revolution involved immense social reforms which interlocutors framed as beneficial to the Cuban nation. Some, though not all, like the state, claim that institutional racism does not exist in Cuba, using the case of the United States as a handy comparative referent. They told me their concerns lay primarily in racial discrimination on an interpersonal level, which continues despite the revolution's better attempts. People spoke about their situations as people of Colour as bad, but 'better than other countries,' citing police murder of Black folks in the U.S. Someone once said to me, 'at least we will not be shot in the street.' Most of my interlocutors' critiques of the revolution related to the party's handling of post-Soviet realities. Though *religiosos* spoke favourably overall about the revolutionary period, they did note that you had to keep your religiosity under wraps and could be fired for being a practitioner.

Many people's narratives followed on by telling me that ostentatious displays of religiosity in the workplace were not that important to them anyways. One 85-year-old interlocutor boasted that she always wore her religious jewellery (*collares* etc.) within a silver bangle, both to conceal it during the revolutionary years but also as representative of not needing to prove her religiosity by putting it on display. Even for the couple of interlocutors of mine who were fired for their religiosity, they said life was generally better back then.[31] This memory of 'before' is often invoked. 'Before' as a non-specific chronotope is frequently discussed among Cubans, though nostalgia for an (imagined) past is certainly not unique to them. The 'before' can be before, prior to transatlantic slavery in Africa;

[31] Importantly, the revolution repressed 'uncreole' collective or individual identities. In addition to religious practitioners and/or people concerned with Black consciousness movements, non-heteronormative individuals, artists and political activists were particularly targeted (Palmié 2006; Sawyer 2005).

before, in Cuba during the slave trade; before, during the republic years; before, during the revolutionary years; or even before, as the most intense years of hardship during the height of the Special Period.

Just as politics of racial identity were dangerous to the revolutionary project, religiosity of any kind also posed a similar danger. In order to praise the rebellious associations of Black Cuban heritage without relaxing the regulations of an atheist government, religious practice was forced to be clandestine but its 'cultural forms' were praised as they were relegated to the realm of superstition-free folklore (Delgado 2009:54-55). Lusane has demonstrated the complicated meanings and ways that Blackness and Africanity are inhabited in the revolution; race is denied as a variable of lived experience, yet Black and African cultural expressions are valorised (1999:77).

Cuba's imaginaries of Africanity were actively deployed in the state's military support for the independence of particular sub-Saharan African countries. The most prominent struggle, in which a number of my interlocutors directly served, was the Angolan war of independence. For some of the Cubans who were involved, it was one of their only opportunities to leave the country, but also a way to relate back to 'homeland.' In 1975, Fidel declared Cuba an 'Afro-Latin country' in reference to its obligation to aid struggles for independence and against colonialism (Palmié 2013: 85). 'The blood of Africa runs deep in our veins,' he said, pointing again to Black skin as irrelevant to Africanity. During my fieldwork, I had some interlocutors who echoed this rhetoric when expressing to me the idea of being at once Cuban and African, without any paradox (see chapter two). As Hernandez-Reguant suggests, Fidel's comment could have been reflective of 'the strategic attribution of African ancestry seal[ing] the claim of national co-ownership of the African past while denying the possibility of contemporary racial prejudice' (2008:82).

In dialogue with this image of an 'Afro-Latin' country was an increasing of folklorised iterations of *la religión* that eased into underscoring Cuba's African heritage, combining it with the revolutionary project and national identity. At the same time, actual practice of religious traditions needed to remain underground. Relying on Black bodies to perform in particular ways, is what Beliso-De Jesús suggests as:

> Black Cuban sexual prowess emerg[ing] as an idealized nationalist sexuality contrasted explicitly with imperialist effeminate masculinities [. . .] the virile macho (black) Cuban subject, the ex-slave that never succumbed to colonial and then imperial penetration, was positioned as the antecedent to the Revolutionary man (2013: 50).

The legacy of racialised associations with *la religión* in dialogue with a national past, lives on. Folklorisation of Blackness and *la religión* remain (Guanche 1983: 359; Palmié 2013:103; Hagerdorn 2001; de la Fuente 2001). As such, the rejection of Blackness persists alongside the embrace of Africanity. Imaginings of Cubans and Cuba in this rebellious, revolutionary light continue. Strategic imaginations of African heritage as revolutionary and rebellious are notable in relation to discourses surrounding the U.S. trade embargo, secondary diasporas of Cubans who left the island during the revolution, and in the Special Period of economic depression following the fall of the USSR. At the same time, Blackness is suppressed. In the present moment, despite the increase in religious tourism, *la religión* is characterised as Cuban cultural heritage. Conflating *la religión* with the nation and its roots, as outlined above, and the previously mentioned gendering of *la religión* holistically as a matrix, serves to bolster the image of a revolutionary Cuba as a masculine one.

Often *espiritistas* contrasted *muertos'* help in *resolver* in the contemporary historical moment with practice during the height of Soviet-era socialism. Odalis, as introduced previously, said the following:

> Before, when we were in the socialist camp, nobody wanted

> for anything. There was everything. The markets and stores were full. A woman could leave work at 5:00, go to the store pick up something ready-made or semi-made and have dinner on the table for 7:00.

Before the Special Period numerous practitioners told me that *Espiritismo Cruzado* had more to do with interpersonal relations. Lydia, also previously introduced, mentioned that before *muertos* were crucial for *rompimientos* (rituals to break negative works of *brujería*). These negative works were, Lydia explained to me, typically motivated by envy. Further, Lydia stressed that because basic survival was ensured, *muertos'* works centred mostly around health, especially severe cases. She told me:

> When doctors didn't know what to do, a *muerto* would. They would say, 'do this, this, and this,' and people who got better, they'd be cured! *Muertos* used to cure a lot and people would go back to the doctor and the doctor would say: 'What did you do?' And you would have to say, 'I don't know, I was taken somewhere, I don't know where, and they did a thing to me, I don't know.'

The Special Period saw many changes in the practice of *la religión* Practice was no longer prohibited by law, however the nature of practice evolved with this historical moment of severe austerity.
While *muertos* once helped with deadly diseases and unfaithful husbands, now they also help keep food on the table and a roof over your head.

Special Period

The fall of the Soviet Union prompted an economic crisis referred to as the Special Period. The Soviet Union's dissolution and loss of all of Cuba's trading partners meant economic depression, which persists but is now somewhat tempered by newer trading partners. As mentioned, most of the financially established Cuban emigres abroad are White, and thus many Cubans of Colour, and especially Black Cubans, are excluded from networks of economic remittances. For this reason, the economic crisis exacerbated already underlying racial polarisation (de la Fuente 1998:62; de la Fuente and Glasco 1997). During the Special Period, the clandestine

nature of religiosity lessened, (depending on the type, see 'Yorubanisation of *la Religión'* in chapter two). *La religión* has also gained public traction through tourism. In the post-Soviet moment, *la religión* is no longer denounced but has merged into Cuban socialism (Palmié 2013:20).

The economic precarity experienced since the fall of the Soviet Union sets a backdrop in which *espiritistas* (as-mothers) are trying to *inventar* (get by). To quote Ochoa (2010) at length:

> All throughout the first decade following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the dead were to be found inhabiting moments of grace and despair as the food and electricity shortages grew ever longer and more severe. The dead were behind much of the creativity the crisis spurred; the dead were the genius behind the new tricks for getting by in the shattered economy (27).

This capacity to creatively *inventar* and get by during the height of the Special Period, which Ochoa attributes to the *muertos* above, continues on despite the crisis' easing. Ochoa's quote elaborates on links of getting by as a hustler-like resilience, Cubanness, and *la religión*.

However, my interlocutors stressed to me that practitioners typically do not take their problems to their *muertos*, the way one may with saints or *orichas*.[32] Because they are 'yours,' *espiritistas* emphasised that *muertos* already know their problems. One *religiosa*, explaining how exactly *muertos resolver*, said to me:

> *Espiritismo* is not going to make money fall from the sky. You have to be there in *la lucha.* [*Muertos*] don't give you money, but they may help you get a good job, or advise you to pay attention to a certain man who has economic resources; they put things in your path. But they are spirits, not magicians.

[32] Non-practitioners sometimes come to *espiritistas* for consultations when they have particular problems, but they seek out particularly capable *espiritistas* rather than *muertos* directly.

This *religiosa's muertos* had done just that, sharing *caridades* that facilitated an improvement in her economic situation through a better job—one that had room for growth beyond the fixed state salary— and in drawing her attention to a man she would meet, her current boyfriend, who is a significant help to her financially. Other practitioners echoed this sentiment, that *muertos* helped by putting things 'in your path,' rather than outright giving you things you need. Instead, someone appears to offer help, whether that be in the form of a monetary gift, a loaf of bread, or a sack of cement to fix up one's house.

In the extreme economic depression of the post-Soviet historical moment, the Special Period saw a 'coming out' of *la religión* in relation to an apparently dramatic increase in engagement. This engagement ranged from fully initiated practitioners to occasional, as needed dabblers. 'Now everyone is a *religioso,*' I was often told by interlocutors. One *religiosa* told me:

> And there are more White people. Sometimes us Blacks are left behind when we need to initiate in *Santo* because we do not have the resources. But White people—everyone is initiating now, the auntie, the grandad, the little children. Because they can. Now it is trendy; it is a status symbol.

In terms of *Espiritismo Cruzado,* my interlocutors felt the increase in practice was not only because it was no longer prohibited or persecuted but rather because hard times drove people to *la religión* in order to *resolver* (make ends meet). Work with *muertos* generally and *Espiritismo Cruzado* in particular, then, has seen a trajectory different to other practices in *la religión* in Cuba's post-Soviet era. While other practices have become status symbols and sources of revenue, due to the more modest scale of *Espiritismo Cruzado,* it has not been as lucrative or fashionable as compared to other religious traditions that have seen an increase in popularity since the 1990s. Instead of overtly being associated with religious traditions that have seen a revival, *Espiritismo Cruzado* fits

into the post-Soviet moment in a different way. While all practices of *la religión* contribute to getting by on the island, *Espiritismo Cruzado* does so in a more imminent and practical way than for example *Santo*, the most popular religious tradition in Cuba which has only garnered more popularity since the Special Period.

Since the Special Period, in addition to being painted as a tropical holiday site, Cuba is often a location for sex and romance tourism and heritage and religious tourism. There are parallels to be made between these two markets. Both involve Cuba's utilisation of its supposedly inherent characteristics as an especially sensual and spiritual place. My interlocutors spoke to me about Cubans, (particularly but not exclusively Cuban men) as having '*sangre caliente'* (being hot-blooded), or '*muy enamorado*,' (prone to 'falling in love.') These characterisations trace on to a colonial past that also hypersexualised Cubans (of Colour). Such characterisations come into play in examinations of romance and sex tourism on the island (Simoni 2013).

Others have made claims that this sexualisation of Cubans offers continuities with the island's past of slavery and colonialism, but also with aspects of Cuba's pre-revolutionary tourist industry during the republic years (Allen 2011:39-40; Coco Fusco 1998; Kneese 2005; Kummels 2005). With an increase in tourism, typically from Europeans, North Americans, and some Latinx folks, the majority of whom are phenotypically White, Blackness has increased as a juxtaposing symbol of Cubanness (Roland 2006; Fernandez 2010:139). The landscape of the Special Period profoundly shaped understandings and expressions of gender, race, religiosity, and nation. Simoni discusses how Cubans practically employ these stereotypes in order to navigate interactions with tourists (2013:181). Others who have written on sex and romance tourism have described the decidedly racialised nature of this 'hot character' or sexual desirability (Pope 2005:108). Such tourism points to the active engagement of Black Cubans within these hegemonic tropes of

Black masculinity and femininity (Fanon 1986 [1952]; Palmié 2002:217; see chapter seven).

Such tropes link to tourism with regards to *religiosos* as well. There is the industry of religious and folkloric tourism wherein Cuban bodies, mostly of Colour, still perform sometimes highly sexualised fantasies of Blackness or Africanity. One example common during my fieldwork was the image of the bare-chested Black *palero* in the Cuban religious imaginary. Such an image has become folklorised into a general practitioner of 'Afro-Cuban religion' (a moniker to be discussed in the following chapter) in dance performances. As Allen notes, the resurgent tourist industry rests on the 'working, dancing, smiling, sexing Black body' (2011:120). Though it is important to note that some Cubans want to move beyond reductive readings of Cubanness (ibid; Simoni 2013:194), tourism requires certain performances of racialised masculinity and femininity.

Through the labour of bodies of Colour and tropes of an exotic, tropical island, Cuban tourism is sustained (Allen 2011:11, 29-40; see also Alexander 2005:60). **The party** began to market religious, folkloric, or heritage tourism, positing Black Cuban culture and *la religión* as forms of expressive culture in order to draw from 'local resources.' This utilisation is now not just to emphasise a rebellious, revolutionary nature, but also to draw in tourists. My interlocutors saw this selling or commodification as 'prostituting' *la religión* (see Martínez Furé 2000:159). At the same time, those without *ahijados* (godchildren) abroad envied those who did have them, positing *ahijados* as highly valued resources of both social capital and monetary help, especially as an opening of networks of financial remittances previously closed off to them. Religious and folkloric tourism has required a further relaxing of Soviet-style revolutionary views on religiosity, and a shift toward what Cuban activist and researcher Roberto Zurbano calls a more kind of 'tropical socialism' (personal communication November 2, 2017).

While I was conducting fieldwork, several significant historical events occurred. Among them, two in particular come to mind. President Obama visited Cuba, the first sitting U.S. president to do so in 88 years. Then, in November 2016, *Comandante* Fidel Castro died. Despite these monumental occurrences, life has changed little for my interlocutors since Obama's visit and even after Fidel's death. People I know did not 'experience' these massive historical events in profound ways. Even after Obama's visit and Fidel's passing, people saw Cuba as 'the same as always.' Lack of drastic change despite such important historical events should however not be mistaken for problematic rhetoric of Cuba as a place 'frozen in time.' While people had hope Obama's visit might mean concrete difference, most felt they were locked in a stalemate. The general view was that as long as the Obama/U.S. administration emphasised change from within and as long as the Cuban government silenced and repressed dissidents, things would remain the same.

Most of the people I know grieved Fidel to some degree regardless of their positions on the party. Some cried, others acknowledged how much he did for both the country and the world writ large. I waited for the other shoe to drop. But it never really did. The party still rules, and Fidel's cult of personality has bolstered. None of the historical moments I have discussed indicate a kind of discrete sectioning off of time. As laid out from the onset, the aim has not been to document Cuban history or outline historical events in their entirety so much as present some influential moments for my interlocutors.

Conclusion

I have shown the historical pathway of meaningful ideas of Cubanness that my interlocutors hold. Romanticised ideas of enslaved persons relate to idealistic, potent, dangerous, and masculine imaginings practitioners themselves have of *la religión* today. The overall historical trajectory of

Cuba locates my interlocutors in a particular position in terms of their lived realities and how their identities sit in dialogue with longstanding, historically informed cultural imaginaries. This chapter has served as a reference point for the environment in which life is navigated more broadly and in which *la religión* is experienced specifically. People's relationships to their religiosity is influenced by the racialised and sexualised stereotypes that I have introduced. In the following chapter I present the practices of *la religión* and outline how it is engaged as a matrix of religiosity imbued with complex meanings and potentialities. The next chapter acts as a starting point for locating *Espiritismo Cruzado* within this matrix of religiosity and putting it into dialogue with other religious traditions as well.

Chapter Two: *La Religión*

Padre nuestro que está en el cielo	Our father, who art in heaven
santificado sea su nombre.	hallowed be thy name.
Venga a nosotros su reino	Thy kingdom come
hágase su voluntad	thy will be done
así en la tierra como en el cielo.	on earth as it is in heaven.
El pan nuestro de cada día dénoslo hoy	Give us this day our daily bread
y perdónenos nuestras deudas	and forgive us our trespasses
así como nosotros perdonamos	as we forgive those
a nuestros deudores	who trespass against us
y no nos deje caer en la tentación	and lead us not into temptation
mas líbranos del mal.	but deliver us from evil.
Amén.	Amen.

Introduction

'Why do we say the *padre nuestro*?' was a question I asked almost all *espiritistas*. I knew about syncretism, continuities and discontinuities, and the idea of engaging a variety of religio-spiritual practices in a way that worked in harmony rather than contradiction. I knew this harmonious convergence was fundamental to understanding *la religión*, a matrix that encompasses a variety of practices with antecedents from different parts of the African continent, but primarily those derived from Kongo-Bantú (*Palo*) and Yoruban-Lucumí *(Santo/Ifá)* practices.[33]

The answers as to why *padre nuestros* were recited were diverse. Many told me that when they referred to '*padre nuestro*' they meant '*Olofi'* or '*Sambi[a],*' the supreme deities of *Santo/Ifá* and *Palo* respectively. One practitioner of *Palo* and *Santo*, Enrique, referred to by most as 'Ki-que,' told me the reason *padre nuestros* were recited was purely due to Spanish colonial influence that had cultivated a false consciousness among some *religiosos*—the subtext there was that he knew better. Ki-que's assessment seems to mirror 'the struggle against the hegemonic force of the colonizer's language, which continues to dominate the mind and

[33] Other religious traditions such as, but not limited to, *Abakúa*, *Vodú*, *Espiritismo de Cordón*, *Espiritismo de Caridad,* and Islam are absolutely relevant to aspects of *la religión* but are outside the scope of the thesis.

speech of the post-colonials, alienating them from their own discursive productions' (Palmié 2013: 89).

A few *espiritistas* told me the reason *padre nuestros* were recited was because of 'tradition' or 'custom.' Others told me it was due to something like *simpatía* (sympathy), referring to affinities between spiritual actors and energies. Brandon writes: 'Sometimes you get the impression when pursuing this line of questioning that you are forcing people to talk about something they rarely think about. It is as if you were asking people to rationalise something which simply exists as a vague background to their religious activities' (Brandon 1983: 180 as quoted in Palmié 2013:127).

While my impression was not that my interlocutors had not thought about these affinities, I did understand from them that they were a given. Especially amongst the array of other problems *espiritistas* face both spiritually and materially—which they may also argue are all one in the same, *padre nuestros* were a minor question. I was told by an interlocutor, with a tone implying the answer to such a silly question was obvious, 'They are all the same. *Olofi* is *Sambi*, *Sambi* is *Olofi*, *Olofi* is *padre nuestro*, *padre nuestro* is *Olofi*, *Sambi* is *padre nuestro*, *padre nuestro* is *Sambi*. They are all the same. It is like, do you know about the holy trinity for Catholics? They are all the same.'

As presented in the previous chapter, representations of *la religión* holistically draw on masculine and Black codings of strength. Individual practices, however, are broken down into binary but relationally fluid classifications of either strong, effective, dark, material and masculine, or soft, mellow, light, spiritual, and feminine. The words of Esteban Montejo, a *cimarrón* (maroon) of the late 19th century, reflect the sentiments of several of my interlocutors: 'No person is one thing pure and simple in this country, because all the religions got mixed together. The African brought his, which is the stronger one, and the Spaniard brought his,

which isn't so strong, but you should respect them all' (1968: 143-144). In this chapter I introduce *la religión* as a matrix of religiosity that is Cuban *and* of African origin.

Before presenting the matrix, however, I discuss Cuban transculturation, a phrase Ortiz coined to refer to a merging of cultures. I will address tensions among *religiosos* by examining the reafricanisation movement, which proponents define as a return to precolonial forms of religiosity. I then outline how my interlocutors perceive non-Cubans' relationships to an apparently uniquely Cuban form of religiosity. After, I briefly consider my choice of not referring to this religiosity as 'Afro-Cuban religion.' These sections form a backdrop for a more detailed, contextualised framework to situate the religious traditions relevant to the thesis. Much like chapter one did not intend to offer a comprehensive historical background, this chapter does not intend to describe *la religión* as a concretised monolith of 'how it is.' Rather, I aim to relate the understandings my interlocutors shared with me and the experiences I had to offer a foundation for understanding the religiosity relevant to the thesis.

Transculturation

The relationship between Africanness and Cubanness was something the *religiosos* I knew talked about often and at length, but not necessarily in terms of an either/or status. I was somewhat surprised that most practitioners did not frame these as mutually exclusive binaries, given the value that dualisms have in the cultural codes and identities of Cubans. Yet despite this penchant for dichotomous codings, for most of my interlocutors, religious traditions within the matrix were recognised as Cuban with African antecedents (Menéndez 2002). I examine questions of Cubanness and syncretism in religiosity through the concept of *transculturation*, a term coined by Ortiz (1987 [1940]), which gets at the

heart of how the Africanness of *la religión* forms part of its Cubanness, a point eclipsed by an either/or framing.

Though my interlocutors emphasise boundaries, and binaries in particular, across components of daily life, this thesis draws attention to how they practically break them down as well. These include distinctions between practices and questions of masculinity and femininity. A notable example of dualisms is in Ortiz's *Contrapunteo Cubano* (Cuban Counterpoint) (1995[1940]), a text that both influences and reflects collective Cuban understandings. In the text Ortiz describes tobacco (dark, masculine) and sugar (light, feminine) as two inherent parts of Cuban history and utilises them as indexes for Cuban identity.

These codings are reflected in how practices come to be gendered and associated with racialised identities. As is the case for religious traditions in the matrix, Ortiz demonstrates that boundaries are at once highly important, but never entirely stable. Coronil assesses that binaries have experiential value but lived experiences are not imprisoned by them (1995: xiv). This thesis complicates certain binaries by shedding light on ethnographic dissonances. These dissonances coincide with my interlocutors' heavy investments in binaries, especially in terms of balance, such as the aforementioned ideas of masculine/feminine; material/spiritual; or dark/light.

When 'syncretism' appears in this thesis it is usually used ethnographically. For example, my interlocutors often told me that an *oricha* (Yoruban-Lucumí deity) was syncretised with an *mpungo* (Kongo-Bantú deity of *Palo).* Many *religiosos* consider the *oricha* Yemayá to be the *mpungo* Madre Agua and/or the Catholic saint the Virgen de Regla. That is, while Yemayá is an *oricha*, people sometimes said they had '*hecho de la Virgen de Regla*,' (literally 'had made the Virgin of Regla') citing a Catholic saint in relation to *Ocha* initiation. Yemayá, Madre Agua, and the Virgen de Regla are three different people, but they are also the same.

Some practitioners refer to them as representations of a dynamic yet coherent energy. Thus, my use of syncretism does not imply a 'consummated synthesis' (Palmié 2013:97), but instead accentuates a converging of harmonious energies.

Ortiz outlines his idea of transculturation as a depiction of the Cuban experience of mixture. He writes:

> I have chosen the word transculturation to express the highly varied phenomena that have come about in Cuba as a result of the extremely complex transmutations of culture that have taken place here, and without a knowledge of which it is impossible to understand the evolution of Cuban folk, either in the economic or in the institutional, legal, ethical, religious, artistic, linguistic, psychological, sexual or other aspects of its life (1995 [1940]: 98).

Ortiz theorised transculturation in contrast to acculturation (Ortiz 1995 [1940]: 97-103). Ortiz used the term to refer to cultural convergence, as opposed to acculturation which he felt denoted cultural acquisition. As Palmié highlights, 'Ortiz partly meant to counter what he saw as an essentially ethnocentric aspect of contemporary (mainly North American) use of the terms *acculturation'* (2013: 95). In so doing, he stressed that *all* cultures change in situations of contact. An exploration of how all cultures are affected through contact suggests that it is not just a question of Spanish + African= Cuban. He notes that there is variation in both categories. The Spanish component of the equation refers to people from different parts of the Iberian Peninsula, while the African component spans present day countries from Senegal to Mozambique (Ortiz 1995 [1940]: 98-100). The above equation would discount the influence and legacy of indigenous populations, Chinese indentured workers, etc., people who I observed as important categories of spirits for many *espiritistas*.

Like acculturation, transculturation involves a simultaneous loss and acquisition. In the case of Cuba, this process is a generative and creative, continuing synthesis. Transculturation, however, is not only the result of

positive points of convergence that produced Cuban selves and nation. Transatlantic chattel slavery and later projects of *blanqueamiento*, as discussed in the previous chapter, are also attempts at Black erasure. This contrast highlights that 'syncretism' is more complicated than solely a dynamic of Catholicism mixing with Yoruban derived religiosity. Palmié echoes this complication in his examination of how *Santo* and *Palo* are in a dialogue, which causes their meanings and characterisations to be co-constituted (2002).

As I have suggested, despite the special importance dualisms and boundaries hold for my interlocutors, they are undone in practice. The very practice of *la religión* exemplifies this undoing. *Palo* folds into *Espiritismo Cruzado*, which bleeds into *Santo*, which is necessarily in dialogue with *Ifá*. Masculine and feminine are unstable but heavily influential signifiers. While the question of Cuban versus African manifested in my fieldwork as mostly Cuban-as-African, there was of course variation in people's characterisations. I observed *Ifá* as a practice that nurses this concern of Cuban versus African. This engagement with the question of *criollo* versus *Africano* seemed to be more akin to the either/or framing of assessments made in some relevant literature.

Tensions

As I have intimated in the previous section, for most of the *religiosos* I knew, when questioning if *la religión* was an expression of African or Cuban religiosity, many practitioners had a similar response: both. Cuba's specific process of *mestizaje* involved a mixture that is both physical and cultural, resulting in what Cabrera referred to as a 'psychic mixture' (1996 [1980]:239). However, *religiosos* are by no means a homogenous whole; there are of course debates and tensions among them. Currently *Ifá* is especially polarised between *babalawos* who frame it as *criollo* and a vocal minority of those enmeshed within reafricanisation movements that understand the practice as *Africano*. The

question of *criollo* or *Africano* among *babalawos* was the most apparent context in which my interlocutors mirrored certain concerns with 'desyncretisation' (Palmié 2013:79), framing *la religión* as something purely African which runs the risk of denying historicity and systematic and systemic changes (Menéndez 1995).

The reafricanisation movement is not limited to Cubans of Colour. In fact, some very outspoken proponents I encountered are phenotypically White in the Cuban context. Recall that African 'ought not to be seen as unambiguously referring to racial constructs' (Palmié 2002: 196). That is, *la religión* as *criolla* versus *Africana* is not a question of *criollo* as 'Cuban' for Cubans of all phenotypes versus 'African' as a Black practice. The debate over reafricanisation was most pronounced via *babalawos'* stance on *iyanifá*. While the reafricanisation movement is not limited to *babalawos,* their divide regarding *iyanifá* presents a concise example. *Criollo babalawos* consider *iyanifá*, women initiated into *Ifá*, to be sacrilege. *Babalawos* who fall on the side of reafricanisation, in turn, feel initiating *iyanifá* is a return to pre-colonial religiosity that Spanish *machismo* had corrupted. This controversy surrounding *babalawos* may feed into why some academics are concerned with the question of *la religión* as African *or* Cuban, a connection I expand upon later in the section, 'Yorubanisation of *la religión*.'

For my interlocutors there was a common understanding that *la religión* being *criolla* is not mutually exclusive from Africanness, but rather encompassed within it. Despite academic debates, I found that *criollo* versus *Africano* was not exactly the most relevant question among my interlocutors, as one was subsumed within the other. The Africanness of *la religión's* roots contributed to making it Cuban, as the role of enslaved Africans held such an important place in Cuban history and has had 'implications for the articulation and expression of national identity' (Ayorinde 2000:81; Routon 2008: 132). I was told *la religión* was both Cuban and African because of the Africanness of Cubanness. This

reasoning did not seem to try to unravel or reverse the synthesis of history or claim that origins hold a greater importance than historical processes (Palmié 2013:79); instead it emphasises the fluidity of history. Aside from the debate between *babalawos* above, for most of my interlocutors, *la religión* was at once African and Cuban. Nevertheless, this debate demonstrates that while *la religión* is all about mixture, people are also invested in differences and divisions.

La Religión as Cultural Patrimony

As introduced above, my interlocutors wanted me to understand that *la religión* is uniquely Cuban, but that it has undeniable African roots. Such roots sometimes served as a means to recognise traditions from their ancestors. *Muertos* in particular concretise relationships with ancestors. *La religión* is understood as a Cuban manifestation of a matrix of different African derived religious traditions. As such, my interlocutors felt it had meaning in relation to their Cuban identity, often citing religiosity as 'cultural patrimony.' This mirrors *Cubanía,* as mentioned in chapter one, the active and precise sense of not only being Cuban but specifically, intentionally identifying as such.

While interlocutors spoke of loss in relation to religious and social values, this idea of loss was not always in reference to an African past so much as a lamentation about the current commercialisation of *la religión* within Cuba itself. *La religión* is characterised in part through its mutability; change is central but there were vague fears of some kind of real, albeit ineffable, unnameable quality or essence that was at risk and needed to be rescued. *Religiosos* were concerned that *la religión* was becoming a product. However, again, it was not change per say that was the concern. Change is endemic to *la religión*.

I was told that after coming to Cuba enslaved people had to discover and *inventar* (make do). One example I was given was in the available plants,

as the flora and fauna differed between countries of origin and Cuba. The practitioners I know did not have a problem with adaptations or adjustments that were necessary to practice outside of Cuba. Nor did they feel that foreigners were disrespectful if they were involved with *la religión* as long as they were properly initiated and advised, following the common refrain '*si tú no sabes, no te metas*' ('if you do not know about *la religión,* do not get involved in it.') While it is true that *religiosos* did not seem to mind foreigners engaging in *la religión,* interlocutors still maintained notions of *la religión* in Cuba as more 'authentic.'
In the previous chapter I demonstrated that my interlocutors often made a connection between practicing *la religión,* racialised identities and being Cuban. However, *la religión* is also practised by Cubans across racial lines. Likewise, these religious traditions are present transnationally (Beliso-De Jesús 2015a, 2015b). As others have shown, this kind of religiosity transcends socio-economic, gender, ethnic, racial, and national lines. Beliso-De Jesús (ibid), for example, has discussed the value of a particular racial consciousness that Black North Americans gain from participating in these religious traditions. *La religión* is by no means limited to Cubans who are Black or *Mulato* (Palmié 2002, 2013). Despite this, most of the *religiosos* I worked with identified with both these categories, sometimes bitterly (Cuban) and at other times proudly (Afro-descended and/or Black or *Mulato*.) Cuban ideologies of mixture do not diminish the ways that particular identities deeply and differentially resonate for my interlocutors.

A Few Words on 'Afro-Cuban Religion'

Naming this kind of religiosity is a decision that carries weight. I have decided on my wording—*la religión* over 'Afro-Cuban religion'— based on my ethnographic experience. I am not naïve to the weight of word choices. I am critically aware that they cannot be conceived as 'superfluous semioticist baggage' (Palmié 2013: 83). 'Afro-Cuban' has come to be a disciplinary construction and a distinct theoretical object,

yet I explore the reactions my interlocutors had to this label in order to unpack why it does not work for the practitioners I know. When it comes to questions of religiosity 'these actors' [. . .] practices, struggles, and identities are being circumscribed, predicated, and valuated,' (Scott 1991: 262) by the language and theory academics employ.

When I used the phrase 'Afro-Cuban religion,' my interlocutors knew what I meant, even if they more commonly framed it as *la religión*; however, there were some reactions that stood out in my fieldwork. Most interlocutors recognised the term as something utilised broadly, in addition to religion, 'Afro-Cuban' music, art, etc.[34] There are some who caution against this label, indicating it might perpetuate a folklorising of Cubans of Colour (Allen 2011:9). Yet, given the discussions regarding Africanness as a part of Cubanness, some practitioners I knew found 'Afro' as a qualifier to Cuban religiosity redundant, and thus slightly senseless. For other interlocutors, 'Afro-Cuban' was an academic's phrase. Ortiz coined the term in *Hampa Afro-Cubana*: *Los Negros Brujos (1986[1906]* {Afro-Cuban Underworld: The Black Witches}), and it has since been utilised by anthropologists both foreign and Cuban alike.[35]

Having laid out why I refer to this religiosity as *la religión*, below I draw attention to how it converges on multiple axes. I detail the parts that

[34] Referring to people as 'Afro-Cuban' was uncommon. I recall a younger practitioner (born after Cuba's involvement in Angolan independence) saying *'¿Afro? ¿Afro que? Nunca iré a África; yo soy Negra'* (Afro? Afro what? I will never go to Africa; I am Black.)
[35] Importantly I did know a small minority who utilised the prefix 'Afro' or the term 'Afro-Cuban', emphasising its importance, especially in reference to their racial identities. Rather than referring to religiosity, 'Afro' was concerning African/Black diaspora in relation to Cuban hip hop culture (Pablo Herrera, personal communication June 4, 2018). Additionally, Roberto Zurbano expressed that anti-racist activists employ the term '*Afro-descendiente*' (Afro-descendent) to make political claims and ties across the Black diaspora, in Latin America in particular (personal communication November 3, 2017).

form *la religión* as a whole. The religious traditions in the matrix acquire their positions by being in conversation with one another. As their meanings are derived relationally, characterisations fluctuate. I build on the notions I have introduced thus far and address the matrix of Cuban religiosity of African origin by practice. First, I show practices' points of convergence and how they come together as a coherent but complicated milieu. I then discuss relevant religious traditions, beginning with Cuban Catholicism or *religiosidad popular* (popular religiosity). Next, I unpack the Yorubanisation of *la religión*, allowing me to address both *Santo* and *Palo* before concluding by examining *Espiritismo*.

What is the Matrix?

As discussed in the introduction, *Espiritismo Cruzado* offers a useful position from which to examine *la religión* because it incorporates components from different religious traditions. Such a makeup parallels the importance of mixture to Cubanness. While other religious traditions are of course influenced by one another, *Espiritismo Cruzado* actively situates itself as a tradition that incorporates elements of other practices. Further, as mentioned in the introduction, *muertos* make up the base of all religious traditions in the matrix, revealing a special relationship shared between *Espiritismo Cruzado* and other practices.

While my thesis deals with *Espiritismo Cruzado*, the nature of religiosity in Cuba is such that a conversation of any practice in isolation is insufficient. My interlocutors described *la religión* as complementary, with different religious traditions serving unique purposes. I highlight the dynamic of *la religión* not necessarily as one practice folding onto another, but as a comingling that both fuses religious traditions and makes important distinctions between them. This section introduces the religiosity relevant to the thesis in order to make sense of my interlocutors' practice. More widely, this thesis aims to demonstrate the experiential nature of *la religión*.

My analysis of *la religión* as a matrix parallels Glissant's poetics of relation. Each practice coincides with an identity; each practice and corresponding identity is extended through relationships with each other (Glissant 2010 [1990]:11). In chapter one, I discussed at length how Cuba, like other parts of Latin America and the Caribbean, is self-consciously predicated upon the idea of racial and cultural mixing (Ramírez 2002a:83). This mixing is the foundation of *la religión*. Rather than a dynamic of the 'best of both worlds,' this kind of religiosity regularly allows for the best of several, mirroring conceptualisations of the makeup of the Cuban person and nation. In some ways, African diaspora religiosity 'resists definition' (Ralph et al. 2017:101), and yet it has to be understood in order to engage with this thesis. Something that is characteristic of African diaspora religiosity and particularly Afro-Atlantic diaspora religiosity is the flexibility and fluidity of practice and the emphasis on immanent, practical action over abstract belief or faith (cf. Asad 1993).

Each person has their own *camino* (spiritual path), meaning that prescriptions and prohibitions will differ for different people. Food taboos are an example of how there is no myth of uniform religiosity in *la religión*. Some people may be prohibited from eating cornflower, others may not be allowed to consume goat meat. Some must avoid swimming while others should bathe in river water as often as possible. Some may be prohibited from initiating in *Palo*, while others may need to in order to survive. There are no hard and fast rules that apply to all *religiosos*; instead they are tailored to each person's unique spiritual trajectory.

These religious traditions are based on the vibrancy of nature (Bolivar 1997), acknowledging the very real spiritual power of nature in all of its manifestations. This idea of a 'vibrancy of nature' was described as spirits (ancestors and deities) allowing for things to be made better through a

comprehension of the natural environment. One *espiritista* mentioned that *gitanas* are associated with sunflowers. Sunflowers carry a spiritual charge that corresponds to *gitanas*. Working with sunflowers or using them in *Espiritismo Cruzado* practice facilitates access to this charge. On another occasion I sat with a *religiosa* as she prepared a ritual bath. The water was dense with green herbs. She explained that understanding nature, through the use of these herbs, and living in harmony with it, utilising such herbs when appropriate, coincides with an adoration of spirits. She explained that spiritual energy resides within everything: rivers and the sea, wind and thunder, trees and flowers, animals and humans etc. Cuban practitioners I worked with often categorised their practices as 'animist religions.'

All practices involve offerings or sacrifices. All rely on the active, agential power of speech and song (Argüelles 1989: 1-8). And all forms of religiosity demonstrate synergistic relationships between human, living practitioners and spirits that occupy a range of categories and classifications. These synergistic relationships work to actualise and affect practitioners' lives. Relationships are verified through what my interlocutors refer to as *prueba* (proof). One *espiritista* explained *prueba* with the following story:

> One day when I was young, really just starting to work with my spirits I was about to get into a communal taxi and go to a party. But suddenly, I felt uneasy, for no reason. I felt this ice cold current and decided to stay home. I knew I needed to. And apparently, my friend later told me that at the party there was a huge fight.
>
> Someone had been accused of messing with someone else's wife and they attacked the man with a machete. He did not die, the other [man] just beat him with it. But I made myself listen to my instincts and my body—my physical symptoms. But those were due to the spirits, even if before, at the time, I did not realise completely. This is how incredibly important it is to listen to your spirits, how connected we are. Now, after *prueba* like that, I always trust my feelings.

This *religiosa's* intuition told her not to attend a party. It proved correct when she later learned of the violence that occurred. Here *prueba* solidifies both her own spiritual capacity and her *muertos*' efficacy. *Prueba*, along with an intimate socialisation, makes for an internalisation of this religiosity (Hodge 2002:35). The way different agential spiritual actors engage is exemplified in Beliso-De Jesús' (2014, 2015b) characterisation of spirits as 'copresences.' Spirits and practitioners—and different religious traditions— not only exist alongside each other harmoniously, they also mutually make each other up. Beliso-De Jesús' intervention gets to the heart of the ontological framework that practitioners of *la religión* inhabit. This ontology (and history and poetry) of Cuban religiosity (Figarola 1989; Holbraad 2012) is conceptualised and interacted with syncretically.

Most *religiosos* and all *espiritistas* I worked with come from families with long histories of practice. While *religiosos* may be 'born into' *la religión*, it is equally something you do (speaking in terms of praxis) as something done onto you ('inherited'). For the practitioners I know, faith or belief were the causal effects of proof generated in one's practical engagement throughout a life course. Knowledge production via spiritual actors is a key component of all practices within the matrix. Communication through divine and/or spiritual processes indicate one's path, but also allows for paths to change when knowledge of them is combined with action. Characterisations of *la religión* have outlined their instrumentality (Hodge 1997) and tangibility; the active, practical, and processual nature of the practices and how they can help Cubans '*inventar,'* '*luchar*,' or '*resolver*,' conveying the difficulty of simply getting by, something which I highlight throughout the thesis. As Ochoa concisely proposes, *la religión* is about love, health, and money (2010:74).

Below I begin with an examination of popular religiosity in Cuba, or 'Cuban folk Catholicism.' I then go on to examine *Santo* and *Palo*. I introduce this discussion with the 'Yorubanisation of *la religión.'* Next, I

outline *Espiritismo*. I discuss the idea of a practice whose literal translation is 'Crossed (*Cruzado*) Spiritism' and what this might mean in Cuba where '*todo es cruzado*' ('everything is mixed.') To act as a comparative referent, but also an important practice that has influenced *Cruzado,* I examine *Espiritismo Kardeciano/Científico*. For now, I speak briefly about *religiosidad popular,* or Cuban Catholicism. All of these sections help demonstrate how *la religión* is understood and experienced as an interconnected milieu.

Religiosidad Popular (Popular Religiosity)

Ortiz posited Cuban Catholicism as 'indifference,' framing it against 'orthodox' Catholicism (1986[1906]: 252). This is, of course, not the case. What is important to note is that Cuba's unique historical trajectory did not only influence the religious traditions brought by enslaved persons. Cuban processes of transculturation also syncretised Catholicism. I observed Cuban Catholicism as small acts commonly focused on private worship, like lighting a candle at home for San Lázaro (see figure 3) for the safety of one's son abroad or for medical test results to come back negative.

Figure 3: San Lázaro with candle

Just as African derived religiosity is not static or atemporal, neither is Catholicism. Traditions do not continue to exist intact, preserved in time without change, whether they are traditions traced back to the 'oppressor or the oppressed' (Brandon 1997[1993]:1; see also **Mayblin** et al. 2017). Drawing heavily from Catholic figures, symbols, styles, references and expressions, popular religiosity takes shape. I offer the following example to demonstrate how a friend of the family configured Catholicism outside of Cuba. When watching a Mexican *telenovela*, '*La Flor de la Virgen de Guadalupe,*' (the flower of the Virgin of Guadalupe) set in Mexico City, she commented that Mexicans were '*fanáticos'* ('religious fanatics'), in reference to the soap opera's weekly plotline, frequently revolving around the horror of teen abortion. 'They go to church every day and they think *everything* is a sin.'

Above, fictions of Mexicans and their religiosity serve as a foil to Cubans' engagement with Catholicism as a cult of saints centred around problem solving. Popular religiosity, or Cuban Catholicism, akin to but different

from *la religión*, consists of constantly evolving heterogeneous practices with discrete degrees of involvement that includes the folding together of different ideologies (ibid). This characterisation mirrors other considerations of Catholicism's elasticity and flexibility (Mayblin et al. 2017). In some ways, Cuban popular religiosity provides a bridge between organised or institutionalised Catholicism, as seen in other moments of Cuba's historical trajectory, and religious traditions of African origin (Ramírez 2002b:270). Once I heard of a *tambor* (an *Ocha* drumming activity) for the Catholic saint Santa Barbara, whose counterparts are Changó and Siete Rayos, in *Ocha* and *Palo* respectively. Though the sacred *batá* drums reserved for playing to *orichas* were not used, I was told this *tambor* was similar in tone to one that might be held for Changó himself.

Different *religiosos* I knew had different reactions to this. Some loved the idea, most shrugged it off, others had no problem, several found it comical and one or two felt it to be a *falta de respeto* (disrespectful). Popular religiosity speaks to the concrete ways those outside of *la religión* express their religiosity. The lines that separate *religiosidad popular* from *la religión,* however, are fragile (Ramírez 2002c: 843). Even those 'outside' of *la religión,* who do not habitually practice, are likely to seek spiritual help in determinant circumstances. The example of the *tambor* for Santa Barbara leads us into a complex discussion of how *Santo* has at times come to a stand in for the matrix as a whole.

Yorubanisation of La Religión

In scholarship about *la religión*, Yorubanisation sometimes refers to the reafricanisation movement touched upon earlier in the chapter (Ayorinde 2000, 2004; Palmié 2013; Routon 2008). Again, most academic works in recent years have critiqued origins-oriented approaches to both scholarship and religious practice, stating that such approaches obscure

the way *la religión* has emerged over time (Menéndez 1995; Palmié 2002). As discussed above, these analyses often centre around whether these practices are African religious traditions in Cuba *or* forms of Cuban religiosity with African inspiration (Ochoa 2010). They cite origins approaches as anachronistic and dangerous because they may conceal the dynamism of practices' trajectories (Palmié 2013).

During my fieldwork I encountered another conversation surrounding Yorubanisation that I found compelling. Both Cuban researchers and/or practitioners spoke to me about Yorubanisation as Yoruban/Lucumí derived religiosity eclipsing other African derived religious traditions. This overshadowing is even evidenced in conflating 'reafricanisation' with 'Yorubanisation.' *Palo* is one such tradition that can sometimes be overshadowed by *Santo*, a process that is particularly important to this thesis. Palmié describes this obfuscation as the superimposition of Yoruban components onto *Palo* (2002: 196).

In chapter one I outlined that the earliest enslaved Africans in Cuba were taken from the Western Central region of the continent, bringing Kongo-Bantú forms of religiosity upon which present day *Palo* practice is based. Subsequently, there was a massive wave of enslaved persons brought from West Africa due to the Haitian revolution and Cuba's consequent sugar boom. These enslaved persons were heterogeneous Yoruban (Oyo) groups and some of their neighbours (Benin, Dahomey, Arara, Ibo, Mandiga). These enslaved Africans and their descendants were classified as Lucumí by the *cabildo* system, which I touched upon in chapter one. As such, Kongo-Bantú derived practices have a much longer history on the island. Some suggested to me that with the sugar boom and the arrival of a large Yoruban population, Yoruban religiosity came to dominate over variants of *Palo* practice.

Beyond this historical trajectory, I intimate that religious and folkloric tourism also impact this phenomenon of Yorubanisation. I observed a

slight irony in trying to 'sell' *la religión* to foreigners alongside the idea of *la religión* as something uniquely Cuban. In some ways it makes the most 'sense' to try and 'sell' *Santo/Ifá*. Those are the costlier of the practices in the matrix. Initiations are elaborate, and practice can sometimes require recurring, expensive animal sacrifices.

However, this angle has a cynicism to it that does not consider the determining will of the *orichas*, which complicates the concept of human choice. Instead the situation is figured as an *oricha* calling for his or her child. Still, there is more financial gain in being involved in the Yoruban side of *la religión.* It has expanded in popularity and traction off the island. This surge of foreign practitioners is partially due to an increase in practice via technology and migration (Beliso -De Jesús 2015b). Further, as Palmié (2013) posits it, 'Afro-Cuban religion' influences anthropological discourse but anthropological discourse also informs Afro-Cuban religion. That is, the material produced on this religiosity via the academy has overwhelmingly been the study of Yoruban inspired practices.

The phenomena of *la religión* as a whole has often become synonymous with *Santo.* This focus may be due to easier access and less secrecy compared to the frequently more stigmatised *Palo*. This scholarship may not only reflect the increasing numbers of practitioners but perpetuate the practice of these forms of religiosity (Palmié 2013: 31). Further, in my experience, among Cubans themselves those on the peripheries of *la religión* are likely to know, for example, that the *oricha* Changó is Santa Barbara and Santa Barbara is Changó. However, they are less likely to know the way *mpungos* (Siete Rayos in this example) are in dialogue with these figures and energies.

Below I introduce other relevant religious traditions. Again, my interlocutors engaged differing combinations of the practices within the matrix. Finding a person who dedicates themselves to one (with the

exception of most *babalawos* and *Ifá*) is quite rare, although some practitioners may emphasise one of two over others. Much of the thesis will engage reasons for this in relation to *Espiritismo Cruzado.* I continue on by expanding on Yoruban and Kongo cosmologies and their contemporary forms of religiosity which centre on a harmonious energy reflected in the power of nature, and by extension human and spirit actors as well.

Palo

Palo is rooted in traditions derived from Kongo-Bantú enslaved persons brought to Cuba. *Palo* is also called *Palo Monte, Reglas de Palo* or *Reglas de Congo*.[36] It has the following branches of practice: *Briyumba, Mayombe*, and *Kimbisa*; the *paleros* I worked with are *Briyumberos* and *Mayomberos*). My interlocutors described to me that within *Palo* there are no moral absolutes of good or bad. One practitioner mentioned to me that fate does not follow sentiment. Fate has no heart, and, similarly, neither does *Palo*. Rather than moral absolutes, practice is focused on flows of energy that need to be balanced. *Palo* emphasises this energy, stressing its manifestation through natural materials and the importance of *muertos* (Bolívar 1997:163-164).

Others argue that *Palo* deprecates women because of its taboos regarding menstrual blood (see Ochoa 2010). The taboos are predicated on the *nganga* (also known as *prenda*, *caldero* or *fundamento*), a sort of composite of objects that serves as a micro-world[37] (see also Cabrera 2000[1954]). The *nganga* (see figure 4) is the centre of *Palo* practice. Animal sacrifices are necessary offerings to *ngangas*. Menstrual blood, as

[36] The 'Rule' of *Palo* or the 'Rules' of Congo.
[37] '*Prenda*' literally translates as jewel, demonstrating how valuable and important it is to *Palo* practice. *Caldero*, or cauldron, references the building block of these composite objects. And lastly, echoing the term *prenda, fundamento* points to the composite object as the centre of *Palo* power.

an especially powerful and vibrant substance, on the other hand, is said to either make the *nganga* too powerful to the point of dangerous or to drain the *nganga* of all its potency. It can either proliferate the *nganga's* strength beyond the point of management,[38] or it can absorb all of the *nganga's* might and capacity for action.

Figure 4: Example of a nganga

There are different hierarchies of participation/initiation within *Palo* that all centre around the *nganga*. The beginning step into *Palo* practice are the *rayamientos* (initiation rites). *Rayamientos* are various small cuts or scarifications made on the body in order to pledge the practitioner's blood. At this stage, the practitioner is understood as a *ngueyo* (novice). A *ngueyo* has no ritual power and is forbidden direct contact with the *nganga.* The next level of initiate, *madre/padres,* are permitted to care for *nganga*, but only *tatas/yayis* are able to assemble, engage, and manipulate them for whatever selected purpose.

[38] Ochoa mentions that this strengthening of the *nganga* could result in the death of the menstruating woman (2010: 76). This potential for death could provide insight into the power of the *nganga*, the menstrual blood, and the woman, and how it seems to frame the latter two as independent from one another.

In addition to *palero*, practitioners of *Palo* are also called *nganguleros*. In part, some of my interlocutors preferred to be known in this way due to the negative, racialised stereotypes of *Palo* as an uncivilised practice, carrying the weight of *la religión*'s associations with *brujería* to the present day. The implication that *Palo* is witchcraft continues to cause some to stigmatise the practice and associate it solely with works of harm, conceptualising *Palo* as violent (Ochoa 2010:10). One interlocutor told me he preferred *ngangulero* over the term *palero* because that is what he worked with—his *nganga*. There are components that are characteristic of most *ngangas*, though there are no rigid, standard models and each is unique. As I observed them, the makeup of *ngangas* typically include sticks, dirt, feathers, and particular human and animal bones within clay or iron/metal containers. This composition leads to an understanding of the different actors including categories of spirit relevant to *Palo* and the *nganga*.

Several practitioners of *Palo* explained to me that the *nganga* is associated with a *mpungo*. I was told *mpungos* are the deities of *Palo* who are connected to all aspects of nature and, like other spirits, subsist in natural matter (Ochoa 2010:21). By extension, *mpungos* are linked to humans and the supreme deity *Sambi[a].* For my interlocutors, the most commonly engaged *mpungos* are Tiembla Tierra, Madre Agua, Centella, Mama Chola, Lucero, Siete Rayos, Sarabanda,[39] and Cobayende (all of whom correspond to Catholic saints and *orichas*). While the *nganga* is associated with strength and masculinity, it can also be feminine because it is under the tutelage of a particular *mpungo*. This feminine gendering does not detract from its power, strength, or efficacy. In addition to each *nganga* being dedicated to an *mpungo*, the *palero's muerto* acts as a sort of '*dueño'* (boss/master) of the *nganga.* Finally, there is the category of *nfumbe.*

[39] 'Sarabanda' is sometimes spelled 'Zarabanda.'

The category of spirit most cited in relation to the *nganga* is the *nfumbe* (Palmié 2002; Ochoa 2010). As I understood it, *nfumbe* is the category of spirit that serves, working to carry out desires, primarily those of the *palero*.[40] Based on *la religión*'s broad and consistent reference to a 'violent past of dehumanization under slave-labour driven forms of plantation' (Palmié 2006:864), Palmié (2006) argues *nfumbe* spirits are reminiscent of enslaved persons.[41] The dynamic of master/slave paralleling *palero/nfumbe*, however, eclipses the multiple actors who work around a *nganga*—it was described to me not just as the *palero* and *nfumbe*. As mentioned earlier, there is also the *mpungo* (again, similar to an *oricha*) and the *palero*'s *muerto*. Furthermore, framing through the dynamic of master/slave may oversimplify what I found ethnographically: that my interlocutors perceived the *nganga*, insofar as it is strongly related to *mpungo* and *muerto*, as having the agential upper hand.

The *nfumbe* corresponds to the human bones acquired to necessarily complete a *nganga*. The *nganga*, then, is an amalgamation of 'spirit-animated objects' and 'objectified person' (ibid 860-861; Ochoa 2010). *Ngangas* are interdependent assemblages that both contain and render spiritual power (Palmié 2002: 168). That is, the *nganga* is both the mechanism and agent of control (Ochoa 2010:7). Human and animal bones, and a skull in particular, are essential to constructing a *nganga*. There are a variety of reasons to seek out human bones from the deceased of varying times and backgrounds; although, there are also safeguards against protecting one's own bones from service, rendering them useless.

Ki-que, mentioned above in the discussion of *padre nuestros*, and his son explained to me that the necessary ritual action would be taken to

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[40] Again, my understanding and description comes from the perspective of a person who is not initiated.
[41] For what happens when slaves revolt, or when *nfumbe* go off course, see Palmié 2006: 876.

disassociate Ki-que's spiritual energy from his bones. Unlike other contexts that might disassociate a person from the bones or material remains of the deceased human (cf. Lock 2002; Sharp 1995), death would not depersonalise Ki-que's essence from his bones (Palmié 2006:874). His bones would be an asset to other practitioners as he is an especially talented *palero.* But thanks to the ritual his son - who would be the recipient of Ki-que's own *ngangas* - would carry out, even if someone were lucky enough to find themselves able to access Ki-que's bones, they would be futile, inanimate objects devoid of their typically inherent, spiritual, charge.

Palmié intervenes on origins approaches of religiosity, *Palo* as Kongo-Bantú and *Santo* as Yoruban-Lucumí, by suggesting that a more useful distinction is articulated through the practice's moral codings. However, my ethnographic experience disrupts the characterisation of *Palo* as centred solely around narratives of dominance and *Santo* as strictly the divine (ibid:25). Typically emphasised as relating to *Santo*, ritual and religious kinship are just as important for *Palo* practitioners as they are for other *religiosos*. Following the common idea that 'no one falls into trance alone,' one *palero* told me, 'no one builds a *nganga* alone.' Furthermore, these religious kinship networks contribute to the processes by which my interlocutors could *resolver.*

I sympathise with Palmié's intervention regarding origins and, having introduced them, try to avoid using practices' origins as their primary distinguishing characteristic. Instead, I follow his questions of, 'how exactly [such] distinctions [are] generated in social praxis, and what is their significance for those who make use of them?' (2002:160). As such, I draw attention to the common consideration that *Palo* is masculine, a '*cosa de hombres*' (a man's thing). Practitioners both contributed to and contradicted this gendered labelling. The image of a *palero* that was often conjured up during my fieldwork was that of a Black man who was dark skinned and bare chested. *Palo*'s masculinity relates to its racialised

characterisations as '*energía caliente'* ('hot energy'), uncivilised, 'dark' (read Black) magic or witchcraft.[42]

Imaginaries portray *Palo* as the 'dark side of *Ocha*,' (Palmié 2002: 167-76), with *'energía baja'* ('low energy'), a hyper-racialised characterisation. Alongside this, however, my interlocutors stressed to me the complexity of its cosmology. In fact, it was *Palo*'s potentiality for force and efficiency that caused my interlocutors to characterise it as beautiful (see also Ochoa 2010:91). Others too have countered pejorative assessments of *Palo*, outlining its emphasis on harmony and balance as some of its virtues (Figarola 2012:60).
One *palero* told me that at its core, 80% of *Palo* is *Espiritismo Cruzado*, though this composition corresponds to *espiritistas* who orient themselves toward *Palo.* Other *espiritistas* actively do the opposite and frame *Palo* practice as more akin to *brujería*.

The relationship between *Palo* and *Espiritismo Cruzado* as I observed it generally falls in line with scholars who claim the two practices share a particularly prominent connection (Hodge 2002; Bettelheim 2010; Román 2007: 72). Yet the widening of religious practice among Cubans (along class and racial lines) does not necessarily lessen the marginalisation of certain traditions, with *Palo* being one of the more stigmatised practices. Nevertheless, as Palmié describes (2002: 163), ideas of temporal and spatial segregation between *Santo* and *Palo* are somewhat broken down in *Espiritismo Cruzado* practice.

The ritual objects that pertain to different religious traditions occupy particular spaces. For example, *prendas* hidden away, dolls in open view, but *Espiritismo Cruzado's* ethos comes from putting the disparate into harmonious congruence. There are some *espiritistas* who take issue with

[42] For more on masculinity, Blackness, and potency more widely in the ethnographic/regional context see Kempadoo 2004; Ortiz 1986[1916]:155; Sánchez Taylor 2000.

the way *Palo* components can sometimes spill over 'too far' into practice, saying that *Espiritismo Cruzado* should be about water, referring to the glasses of water on the *bóveda* (spiritual altar), not blood, referring to ritual animal sacrifice. One *espiritista* who held this belief cited *Palo* as '*demasiado fuerte'* (too aggressive or strong). The excess strength suggests a characterisation of *Palo* as something brutish and unrefined, an association echoed in literature (Palmié 2002:164). More commonly, however, interlocutors told me such an engagement with *Palo* is due to ignorance of the practice's richness. *Palo* carries legitimacy and spiritual capital, yet it is denigrated as well. Recall that while the matrix is racialised holistically as Black, as individual religious traditions *Palo* is branded as 'dark and authentic' and *Santo* as 'light and divine' (Palmié 2002: 167-176; Wirtz 2014:60; Johnson 2007:249). While syncretic religiosity of multiple practices does not provide overt reasoning for prejudices, it does not preclude them either.

The stereotype of *Palo* as a practice that is particularly ruthless, contractual, and about self-serving exchange broke down in my ethnographic experience. Ochoa's work supports my observations. He suggests *Palo* is just as much about hope as it is about fear (2010:2). *Palo* does often function to improve one's material circumstances. However, this instrumentalism is relevant to all the religious traditions in the matrix. As Ochoa writes, 'What is exceptional about Palo is its creative potential, its love of the base and abject, and its love of speed and unsentimental decision taken to transform staid and oppressive fates (ibid 261).

In the thesis' introduction, I detailed the broader gendered codings of hot and cold. These are similar to gendered codings in *la religión*. That is, women are cool (headed), and men are hot (tempered/ blooded). It follows, then, that *Palo*-as-masculine's energy functions on the level of hot, one that constantly needs cooling through different actions and material substances. *Santo*, on the other hand, is perceived as a cooling,

feminine practice (Ochoa 2010: 94). Below I continue with a more detailed discussion of *Santo* and how it fits in to the wider matrix.

Santo/Ifá

Reglas de Ocha, *Santo* or simply *Ocha* is a Yoruban derived Cuban religious tradition. This practice is based on the premise of deference to saints or deities called *orichas* (also called *santos*) who require offerings. *Orichas*, divine ancestors from West Africa, correspond to elements from the living world.[43] *Ifá* is also a Yoruban/Lucumí derived practice. It is a prestigious heteromasculine (all male) divination cult.[44] These diviners, *babalawos*, act on behalf of Orula, the *oricha* of divination. Some consider *Ifá* to be the highest level of *Santo*, while others categorise it outside of *Santo*.

While *Palo* is racialised as dark and labelled as 'material,' *Santo* is understood as 'light,' more 'assimilated' and 'spiritual' (Delgado 2009:62; Palmié 2002: 167-176; Wirtz 2014:60; Johnson 2007:249). However, the binary of *Palo* as material and *Santo* as spiritual is disrupted when *Ifá* is included in the framing. *Santo* then goes from more spiritual than *Palo*, to less 'celestial' than *Ifá*, and more 'earthly.' The masculine codings of *Palo* and *Ifá* in relation to these frameworks (material/spiritual; earthly/celestial), highlight the way that 'masculinity is not a fixed entity. It is constantly adjusting and changing with different circumstance' (Lewis 2007:8).

At the heart of both *Santo* and *Ifá* is the concept of *aché*. This Yoruban-Lucumí term refers to a generative and affective spiritual energy that is

[43] Some *orichas* are not ancestors, like Obatala who predates human existence.
[44] Recently, as introduced earlier in the chapter, in Cuba, there have been several women initiated as *iyanifá* (priestess of *Ifá*, which counterbalance *babalawos* [priests of *Ifá*]). In the Cuban context, initiating women into *Ifá* has been significantly controversial and the majority of *babalawos* are against women's inclusion.

found within, but also makes up, all living things (Viarnés 2010: 339). It is understood that each person is born as a child of an *oricha*, but only through divination can they discover which one (Clark 2007:36; Méndez 2014:106). *Santeros* are associated with a particular *oricha* and will devote themselves to whichever *oricha* they are received by. There are numerous *orichas* but the most prominent in my fieldwork were Eleggúa, Yemayá, Obatala, Ochún, Changó, Babalú Ayé, Ogún, Ochosí, and Oyá. Each *oricha*, who correspond to both *mpungos* and Catholic saints, has a particular personality. Some say they serve as archetypes, while others say that this characterisation is only due to ignorance of the *patakis*, sacred myths or legends of Yoruban derived practice. However, although *patakis* demonstrate *orichas* as complex people irreducible to archetypical models, practically speaking, as access to the *patakis* is not widespread, *orichas* are usually understood reductively.

Women are often able to occupy social roles of status and respect in *Santo* practice. The ability for women to garner social prestige in *Santo* has led to characterisations of the practice as 'female-centric' (Clark 2005). However, despite the social power that women can gain through *Santo*, their ritual capacities are limited. For example, like in *Palo*, *Santo* also has ritual restrictions for women surrounding menstrual taboos. Additionally, there are restrictions regarding who can perform particular components of initiation ceremonies and who is allowed to sacrifice four-legged animals. In fact, despite their gendered codings in wider Cuban cultural imaginaries, I actually found there to be more ritual limitations for women in *Santo* than *Palo*.

Santo could perhaps be understood as 'female centric,' however, in that it is generally stereotyped as more feminine. This stereotyping may be due to the way the relationships between practitioners of *Ocha* and *orichas* take form, as one of reciprocity and practitioners' deference to *orichas*. There is a parent/child dynamic wherein one is the son or daughter of their *oricha*. Both academics and practitioners focus on kinship and

sometimes contrast this organising logic with *Palo*. Though I interpret this comparison as a false; I observed that *Palo* too involves deferential engagement with categories of spirits and fosters rich kinship ties.

Another comparison that underwrites the notion of *Santo* as feminine is its association with lightness and coolness. The importance of trance as a method of communication between *santeros* and *orichas* also contributes to the feminine codings of the practice. Trance as a defining factor of femininity relates to a gendered comparison more in relation to *Ifá* than *Palo,* as *Palo* can also include trance (see chapter seven). Further, unlike *Ifá* whose practitioners can only be heterosexual men, *Santo* is open to women, queer, and non-binary individuals, as is the case with *Espiritismo*.

Some *paleros*, though not all, exclude queer folks from practice, refusing to initiate them. There were a handful of *yayis*— again, the highest status of women in *Palo*, who shared with me that if their spirits agreed, they would initiate homosexuals (men or women). I met no *tatas, yayis'* male counterparts, who held this view. In contrast, for those with *Santo* in their path, there are no prohibitions from initiation, apart from the steep price.[45] All of the feminising components of *Santo* can be seen in the codings of *Espiritismo Cruzado* as well.

Espiritismo: Todo es Cruzado (Everything is Mixed)

To refer to a singular practice of *la religión* as *'cruzado'* (mixed; literally translated as 'crossed'), is slightly misleading. This qualifier could lead to a supposition that other religious traditions are not equally variegated. As has been demonstrated, my interlocutors considered everything in Cuba

[45] Cost is a major factor for *Santo/Ifá.* While Xhercis Mendéz writes that *Ocha* practice is open to 'every 'body,' 'regardless of body-type, racial background, sexual orientation' (2014:105), this statement disregards some relevant contextual class factors, as I know many Cubans who need to *hacerse Santo* but cannot due to the price of initiation.

to be '*cruzado'* or syncretised.[46] However, as I explained in the introduction, I utilise the label to primarily accentuate the importance of mixing, fluidity and ambiguity. Further, the label '*Cruzado'* also helps to distinguish practice from other types of *Espiritismo*, for example, *Espiritismo Científico* (Scientific Spiritism). I offer a discussion of *Espiritismo Científico* followed by a brief consideration of *Espiritismo Cruzado* to set the scene for the rest of the thesis. Putting these two forms of *Espiritismo* in conversation will also highlight how *Espiritismo Cruzado* occupies a unique position in the matrix as it brings different religious traditions into conversation.

Kardeciano/Científico

Espiritismo Científico is based on the teachings of its founder Allan Kardec, a 19th century French 'man of science' interested in investigating and systematising 'supernatural' phenomena such as clairvoyance (Román 2007:32-34; 108). Like *Espiritismo Cruzado, Científico* is based on mediations and communications with spirits of the dead. However, *Kardeciano/Científico* posits itself more as a scientific philosophy than an explicit form of religiosity. This kind of Spiritism focuses on unilinear concepts of spiritual elevation, often denigrating *Espiritismo Cruzado* for focusing too much on matters of material and practical concerns, and less attention on purifying the soul. *Científico* punctuates divisions between the material and the spiritual, the unenlightened and enlightened. *Espiritismo Científico* puts more stock in absolutist morality, and is highly influenced by Protestant Christianity.

By the mid to late 1800s *Científico* was being practiced in Cuba. It appealed to White, privileged classes, 'especially those with liberal, scientific, and anti-clerical inclinations' (Román 2007: 27, 33). Similar

[46] For critiques of '*cruzado*' as having negative connotations, albeit critiques I did not encounter during my fieldwork, see Viarnés 2010:330.

kinds of Scientific Spiritism are practiced in other contexts, such as parts of the United States, Europe (particularly Spain and France), Brazil, and Puerto Rico. I was told this kind of Spiritism in Cuba incorporates many aspects of 'New-Age' or 'Eastern' traditions—using crystals and reiki in acts of communication and healing. *Científico* emphasises progression and is cited as a 'modern' alternative to African derived religious traditions (Viarnés 2010: 328-329). Unlike other components of religiosity in Cuba, there is less of a claim made on practice in relation to cultural patrimony or an ancestral link. This of course does not mean the practice has not undergone a kind of Cubanization, only that it aligns itself more with the abovementioned variants of Spiritism than with *la religión.* That is not to say that Black or *Mulato* Cubans do not practice *Espiritismo Científico.* However*, Científico's* emphasis on rationality and reason are often coded as White/light when compared against *la religión* as *'*African superstition' and, separately but relatedly, Blackness (Román 2007:6, 34). These racial codings again points to distinctions of African and/or Black as material and light/White as spiritual. *Espiritismo Científico* and *Espiritismo Cruzado* have similarities and differences. One point of divergence is that while *Cruzado* is relegated to private, intimate, domestic settings, *Científico* can sometimes have small centres and associations that are more open or public. Song and dance, which are stressed as critical to practice of *Cruzado*, are absent from *Científico*. Additionally, substances like liquor or tobacco, which are also essential to *Cruzado* practice, are forbidden in *Científico.*

In *Espiritismo Científico*, the language used to refer to spirits is exclusively '*espíritu'* not '*muerto*' (literally translating as 'dead'). For practitioners of *Espiritismo Cruzado*, on the other hand, *muerto* and *espíritu* (spirit) are considered interchangeable terms. The spirits communicated with in *Científico* are strictly 'enlightened' and usually differ from the *muertos* found in a *cuadro espiritual*. My ethnographic experience with *Científico* is limited, but I was presented with its significance to *Espiritismo Cruzado* on occasion. For example, most

weekly informal meetings dedicated to spiritual development, or *escuelitas*, held in *Espiritismo Cruzado* began with readings from Kardec's books. While some *espiritistas* may not know exactly who he is or what he espoused, brief readings from his book were part of their routine.

For this thesis, one of the most noteworthy points of divergence regarding *Científico* and *Cruzado* was that unlike spirits in *Científico* who have no gender, sex, or race, *Espiritismo Cruzado* emphasises spirits' gendered and racialised identities (Hodge 2003:10). Further, I noted in *Científico* there was a more balanced distribution of men and women. *Espiritismo Cruzado* was described to me by some *religiosos* as the 'youngest,' meaning most recent religious tradition, and by others as the oldest. Being labelled the youngest denoted an emergence alongside *Espiritismo Kardeciano/ Científico*, and the oldest referred to 'relationships with *muertos* [as] older than any concept of "religion."' The *religioso* who told me this stated that *Espiritismo Cruzado* is 'older than its name.'

Cruzado

Espiritismo Cruzado is the focus of this thesis. Like the other practices in the matrix, it is a Cuban religious tradition based on spirit mediation. *Cruzado* was described to me both as a religion, and as something that transcends religion. The reasoning for this description was because practitioners do not have to believe in the same God. In fact, *Espiritismo Cruzado* practice does not necessarily rest on any kind of supreme being. I knew one practitioner who self-identified as an atheist, although he was a singular case. Though *Espiritismo Cruzado* is not explicitly a current iteration of a particular African religious tradition, it is enmeshed in the wider environment of Cuban religiosity of African origin and includes components from several practices. *Espiritismo Cruzado*'s flexibility epitomises the freedom of practicing *la religión 'a mi manera'* ('my way'), meaning however you choose or however is right for you.

Most of my interlocutors did not use the term '*Cruzado,'* though they were aware of it. For them, the *Espiritismo* they practice *is Espiritismo* and *Espiritismo Científico* or *Kardeciano* is something different. As mentioned, I refer to the practice as *Espiritismo Cruzado* to emphasise its difference from other variants of *Espiritismo* and to highlight it as a uniquely configured manifestation of Cuban religiosity. *Espiritismo Cruzado* is a practice influenced by *Palo*, *Ocha/Ifá*, Cuban Catholicism, and *Espiritismo Científico/Kardeciano*. That said, *Cruzado* is very different from other manifestations of *Espiritismo* both on the island and off.

Little work about *Espiritismo* in Cuba has been done in English as compared to the examination of *Palo* and especially *Ocha/Ifá*. And, as discussed in the introduction, of the limited number of studies that have been done, they have primarily been conducted by Cuban anthropologists writing in Spanish. Espirito Santo, one of the few foreign anthropologists who has undertaken research on *Espiritismo*, has argued that overemphasising the differences between forms of practicing *Espiritismo* is either of little importance or dubious as it reifies problematic distinctions (2015a).

I am less interested in defining practices of *la religión* than I am in exploring how people live in relation to them. I understand the epistemological and political choices that motivate a desire to put different kinds of *Espiritismo* on equal footing. That is, to contest notions that *Cruzado* is lowly while *Científico* is more evolved (ibid 41). However, based on the feelings my interlocutors expressed to me, from the standpoint of practitioners of *Cruzado*, the differences between the variants of *Espiritismo* are of vital importance to ideas of community, gender, race, identity, and embodied knowledge. I follow Cuban anthropologists' claims that *Espiritismo Cruzado* is more closely aligned with religiosity of African origins and more distant (yet still influenced by) *Espiritismo Científico* (Hodge 2002:22). *Espiritismo Cruzado*, like the rest

of the practices that inhabit the matrix, serves as a gendered and gendering space. The questions of who and what is gendered and how are the concern of my thesis.

As detailed, the characterisation of *Palo* as rough, masculine and about blood is in contrast to *Espiritismo Cruzado* as light, feminine and about water. This comparison refers to the *nganga* and *bóveda* respectively. Much of *Espiritismo Cruzado* takes places in relation to a *bóveda*, or spiritual altar (see figure 5). It is a table adorned with several glasses of water, or sometimes only one. Because there is no uniform practice of religiosity, it is difficult to characterise a typical *bóveda*, but most that I saw included candles, *jícaras*, bottles of rum or *aguardiente,* perfume, tobacco, and flowers. Given the precarious material realities of Cubans, it was usually whatever combination of the aforementioned were available at any given time. Most *bóvedas* are adorned with figurines, statuettes or dolls. Additionally, I often saw shells or stones and the occasional small crucifix. Activities like *escuelitas* take place around the *bóveda*, and *cajones* take place in front of it.

Figure 5: Example of a bóveda

Espiritismo Cruzado is primarily, though not exclusively, practiced by women. This thesis will engage who *espiritistas* are and what it means to be one, discussing questions of *don* (innate spiritual gift) and *desarrollo* (development), a continuous process of spiritual cultivation. Both are necessary to practice *Espiritismo Cruzado*. Different to the rest of the religious traditions of *la religión, Espiritismo Cruzado* does not require formal initiation rites. By being based on an 'innate capacity,' the practice is both more and less exclusionary than other religious traditions. *Espiritismo Cruzado* is generally more financially accessible than other religious traditions because there is no initiation.

This openness seemed to affect women in particular; a lack of ritual hierarchies and expensive rituals meant a greater level of accessibility. Women could be the protagonists of their own religious stories, the directors of their spiritual practice/lives. In my ethnographic experience, I

observed Black women in particular as protagonists. In conversations with Ileana Hodge, a well-known Cuban scholar of *Espiritismo*, she told me that because women are able to utilise *Espiritismo Cruzado* according to their own beliefs they are able to achieve a role much greater than in other religious traditions in the matrix (personal communication August 23, 2016). At the same time, however, there is an exclusionary dimension to *Espiritismo Cruzado* as practitioners told me that developing in the practice without the *don* or gift was a fool's errand.

Espiritismo Cruzado has similarities and differences with *Palo* and *Santo*. The similarities include direct communication with spirits; an understanding of the spiritual power of natural components (animal, vegetable, and mineral); the power of offering or sacrifice; and the idea that spirits perform work for solving and eliminating material problems that contribute directly to practitioners' wellbeing during their human lives (Hodge 2002: 23, 26). As intimated at other points there is tremendous overlap between *Espiritismo Cruzado* and *Palo* (see chapter seven). *Espiritismo Cruzado* like *Palo* has *prendas*. These are *prendas espirituales* (literally 'spiritual jewels'), different from but similar to *Palo*'s *prendas materiales* (again also called *ngangas, fundamentos*) of *Palo*. Unlike those of their *Palo* counterparts, *prendas espirituales* do not include human bones.

In addition to questions of material versus spiritual, Hodge discusses another difference. She outlines how menstruation does not limit women's participation in *Espiritismo Cruzado* practice (2003: 5). I observed the lack of ritualised menstrual taboos in *Espiritismo Cruzado* as well. I never witnessed an *espiritista* abstain from sitting at the *bóveda* and working with *muertos* whilst on her period. I observed the menstrual taboos of other religious traditions to only be relevant in *Espiritismo Cruzado* practice at the discretion of the *espiritista*. Some who choose to abstain from specific aspects of *Espiritismo Cruzado* practice during menstruation expressed they did so because they were initiated in

another practice of *la religión* and choose to uphold the practice's taboo. The most I saw was an *espiritista* who is *rayada* (initiated) in *Palo* choose to not shake a maraca for her *muerto principal,* who was also a *palero* during life, as she felt he would have taken offence, something the rest of her spiritual family agreed with.

Similarly, *muertos* may call for animal sacrifice from practitioners of *Espiritismo Cruzado* who are initiated in *Santo* and/or *Palo*. However, I did not encounter this for any *espiritista* who was not initiated in other traditions. Often *muertos* refer *espiritistas* to *Santo* initiation, consulting a *babalawo*, or ritual works that need to be undertaken through *Palo*. Still, *Espiritismo Cruzado* is a practice in its own right. *Espiritismo Cruzado* is fundamentally about working with spirits. Because its practice incorporates aspects from several religious traditions in the matrix, it was often characterised as the tradition that is the most *criolla* (Cuban).

Conclusion

I have laid out the context in which *la religión* is practiced. I have detailed how this milieu is mostly made of Cuban religious traditions with African antecedents or inspirations. I have addressed certain concerns regarding terminology, the question *of la religión* as *criolla* (synonymous with Cuban) and/or *Africana* (African) by utilising both the concept of transculturation and through a brief discussion of a relevant debate occurring during my fieldwork. I have discussed how despite *la religión* being conceived of as a uniquely Cuban form of religiosity, my interlocutors believed its practice could be undertaken by non-Cubans or those outside of Cuba. Because the ethos of religiosity is predicated on processes of renewal and relational definition, difference is, to a certain extent, accepted.

My interlocutors explained *la religión* as a relational matrix, highlighting that different practices are in a constant dialogue that illuminates similarities and differences. Building on this discussion, I further

interrogate one difference: the binary of ritual initiation versus innate capacity or gift. Unpacking this binary helps situate the relationships and experiences shared between family and work with *muertos*. Further, I elaborate on the negotiation of the mundanity of practitioners' geo-political situations via their practice. Chapter three begins to speak to this negotiation through themes of mothering, mothers and motherhood that are both implicitly and explicitly relevant for my interlocutors' practice.

Chapter Three: Family

'Mothers are important not only for their wombs and breasts but also for their knowledge, emotional commitment [to children] and awareness of [. . .] duty…' (Guy 1997: 170).

Introduction

The above quotation comes from Donna J. Guy's examination of the multiple concepts of mothering from the perspective of Latinx cultures. Guy's blunt and precise assessment proves convincing when examined alongside a practice like *Espiritismo* and the Cuban context more broadly. The statement demonstrates the emphasis on physical processes of reproduction and mothering –like pregnancy and nursing— but also the way mothers are multi-dimensional and valorised persons who are rich resources of knowledge. For many Cubans I know, their mothers are the most important figures in their lives. I certainly observed mothers as the centres of both family and household (see Härkönen 2016:5). Based on the unique configuration of spiritual kinship in *Espiritismo* practice, and with an examination of the importance of mothers in Cuban family, in this chapter I will show how mothers and mothering kin contribute to *espiritistas*' spiritual development and their wider navigation of *Espiritismo* practice.

In the previous chapter I outlined the different religious traditions that make up the milieu of *la religión* and ended with a discussion of *Espiritismo*. I highlighted that unlike other practices, *Espiritismo Cruzado* is predicated on a *don* (gift) rather than initiation. I take this difference between religious traditions into consideration alongside other elements that may be more apparent or more frequently discussed such as origins, ritual actions, and relations between practitioners and spirits. Here I examine what (spiritual) family looks like in a religious tradition that is not rooted in initiation rites and therefore does not include ritual

kinship.[47] Taking this lack of ritualised kinship structure as productive, I suggest that spiritual development in *Espiritismo* practice is constituted from a young age through intergenerational familial relationships. As such, I examine how *Espiritismo Cruzado* practice demonstrates a unique relationship between religiosity and family. By addressing family, I build on ideas presented in the introduction about gender and mothering. Using mothering and reproduction as analytics, I explore how these familial relationships unfold in *Espiritismo,* specifically through the ongoing process of *desarrollar* (spiritual development).

Indeed, during my fieldwork, the more I interrogated ideas of *desarrollar* in *Espiritismo Cruzado,* the more I discovered the importance of familial relationships. I suggest an exploration of family is helpful to examining my interlocutors' spiritual practice. While this chapter is titled 'Family,' the reader will notice that it mostly focuses on mothers, grandmothers, aunts, and great-aunts. As I paid close attention to the dynamics of family, I noticed that most revolved around women kin. While mothers are more emphasised and active, fathers are also important and framed, ideally, as (financial) helpers. For a variety of reasons, not least of which the Special Period and its lasting effects on the country's economic situation, often times men are not able to realise these roles. This reality folds back onto both the archetype and necessity of mothers-as-hustlers. As presented in the thesis' introduction, this chapter's examination of family highlights the porosity and relevance of the categories of mothers, motherhood and mothering.

To locate the discussions in this chapter, I return to my spiritual family. These are interlocutors who are relevant throughout the thesis. Through them I am able to discuss wider notions of family and mothers pertinent to the context before expanding on the dynamics that contribute to ideas

[47] In initiation-based forms of religiosity, there is also an argument to be made regarding 'religious' over 'ritual' family as people sometimes end up practicing in networks that go beyond those who are strictly ritual kin (i.e. shared godparents, godparents themselves, etc.).

of an either/or framing of gift and initiation. I demonstrate how these framings are disrupted in processes of spiritual development. Including both the living and the dead, spiritual development in *Espiritismo Cruzado* practice can be recognised as a process of reproduction.

As discussed in the thesis' introduction, I suggest that for my interlocutors, reproduction is a crucial component to women's gendered personhood and that following the thesis' title, womanhood and motherhood frequently are conflated. I concretely address how an *espiritista*'s family (mothers, aunts, grandmothers etc.) contributes to her spiritual development. Spiritual development shows the parallels between guiding another *espiritista* in her spiritual development and raising a child, which contributes to the deep-rooted organising fabrics of gendering, and in this case specifically mothering, that I suggest underlies *Espiritismo Cruzado*. Below I zoom in to present my spiritual family and zoom out to set the scene of family and mothers relevant to the Cuban context.

Zooming in and Out: My Spiritual Family and Wider Context

Active work with *muertos* begins under the guidance of family. The idiom of motherhood, combining the biological and social, repeats itself in through different, processual areas of relatedness in *Espiritismo* as practitioners come together in settings such as *escuelitas* and *cajones*. While typically my interlocutors would define family through blood, in practice, as Härkönen suggests, for Cubans, consanguinity alone is not the basis for kinship (2015:66). Anthropological discourse has long problematised the notion that biology is the foundation for kin relations by highlighting kinship as processual (Carsten 1997, 2004; Lambek 2013; Weston 1991, 1995) and by exploring how the physical (and/or biological) and social aspects of kinship merge (Carsten 2004). These examinations importantly complicated previous classifications of kinship that theorised it in terms of nature/law and substance/code (Schneider

[1990]1968, 1984). In fact, the malleability of so called ‘natural’ kin categories had been exemplified in earlier anthropological examples such as men as mothers in some South African contexts (Radcliffe-Brown 1924 as cited in Sahlins 2011:4) or Bantu-Lovedu women who come to be fathers (Krige & Krige 1943 as cited in Sahlins 2011:4)

Adding texture to their own figuring of ‘natural’ kinship, often times Cubans I know spoke of friends or neighbours as more family than their own blood. These reckonings played out in *Espiritismo* as well. While most *espiritistas* develop under the watch of biological mothers, aunts, and grandmothers, those who are not your biogenetic kin also mother novice *espiritistas* along in their practice. Indeed, my own spiritual development, which began much later in life than is typical, was supervised by Odalis and her family. Over the course of my fieldwork Odalis had become one of my closest friends and a valuable interlocutor. She is a kind of spiritual mother to me. I met her and her family through her older son Palomo, an anthropologist tasked to investigate *Palo* and its relationship with the environment. While I met the family via Palomo, also a budding *religioso*, my friendships with the women of the family became stronger over time.

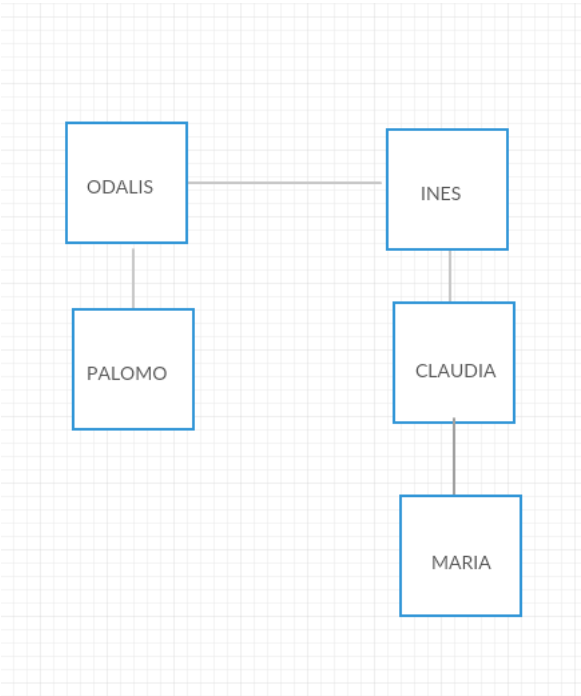

Figure 6: Diagram of Odalis and some members of her family

All the women in the family look alike; they have the same attractive bone structure with high cheek bones and defined, but not sharp, jawlines. They all identify as Black and vary in shades of brown. Odalis once jokingly bragged to me that until María was born, she had been the lightest in the family. Odalis is *rayada* (initiated in *Palo)* and is a daughter of *Eleggúa,* the *oricha* of children, childhood, and in-betweenness; he is often characterised as a playful trickster. Odalis' first husband, Palomo's father, died when Palomo was 5 years old and she has long been separated from the father of her second son. She is single and often lamented to me that she wanted to find someone for companionship and perhaps to lessen everyday financial burdens.

Claudia, Odalis' niece, has skin which is a richer shade of brown. She wore her hair in a short bob-style that she irons straight. She is tall and thin, young and pretty. Claudia's daughter, María, was 4 going on 5 for most of my fieldwork. Claudia and María live with Odalis, Palomo, and Palomo's younger brother. Her mother and Odalis' younger sister, Ines, live just across the street with her husband. Claudia and María sleep at

Odalis' home but eat their meals and do their laundry at Ines'. These kind of flexible living or domestic arrangements were not uncommon, and they serve to demonstrate varieties of families in terms of households. Households are often organised in this way due to the party's designation of rations of basic necessities, (*mandatos*) primarily foodstuffs, which were almost always in short supply since the Soviet Union's collapse (see also Pertierra 2008:745). Often people speak about their actual residences and their official residences *de libreta*, where the party allocates their *mandatos*. Importantly, Claudia was in the thick of an especially crucial moment in her spiritual development during the time of my fieldwork.

María, bossy, playful, and energetic, is *Mulatica* with a mass of curly hair that Claudia seemed to be trying to tame more often than not. Her laughs and shrieks were frequent, high-pitched, lively, and animated. As remarked upon in the introduction, despite her age, María's *vista* (spiritual sight) was often praised as being impressively developed. *Vista* was explained to me with a lot of care. It was described to me as a sense you might have if you are an *espiritista,* but a sense that you have to develop. I was told that it usually occurs in your mind, and *muertos* transmit images to you. According to my interlocutors, *vista* can work in one of two ways: spirits can place images in your mind, or they can cause you to see a scenario as if it were being played out in a movie. For María, it was unclear as to how exactly her *vista* manifested, though her family told me that she frequently saw and communicated with her deceased great-grandmother, Ines and Odalis' mother. Regardless of how María's *vista* would manifest, *vista*, like all ways of communicating with *muertos*, is like a current that flows between you and your spirits (Espirito Santo 2015a). Odalis, Claudia, María, and their interconnected relationships crystallise many relevant and interesting questions, such as how development progresses under the guidance of family in general and of mothers and maternal figures in particular.

For my interlocutors, mothering done by a singular person was unlikely. Rather, wider networks work together to mother. People either overtly expressed this or acted in such a way that seemed to point to this belief. While economics certainly plays a role in the configuration of these networks and their collaborative efforts of mothering, I am inclined to argue that shared mothering does not stem from financial precarity alone but also from an experience of pooled responsibility. Nevertheless, economics is important to understanding mothering. Elise Andaya writes that for her Cuban interlocutors, appropriate womanhood required economic independence just as much as more 'normative' qualities, such as beauty (2014:29).

An emphasis on women having their own finances reflects the supposedly common-sense notion that most men spend their money on women and drink while women spend their money on children and the household. Again, in other contexts of Black diaspora, and within African America in particular, there is a strong emphasis on economic self-reliance as a dimension of motherhood (Hill Collins 2000 [1990]:184). Economic situations are also reflected in the housing dynamics for most Cubans. For my interlocutors, multiple generations often lived together under one roof. In the case of the *solares* (similar to projects, 'ghettos', or tenements), these families would sometimes occupy one or two rooms and occasionally share communal bathrooms. Even those Cubans with more material resources live with different, and often rotating, family relations. Much of these dynamics are attributed to substantial material constraints (Hamilton 2012:223).

Just as raising a child is not limited to mothers alone, neither are mothers the sole source of spiritual training. For example, like childcare tasks that are shared by a group rather than being left solely to a mother or a single caregiver, aunts and grandmothers are often family members credited as those who cultivate spiritual capacities (Colen 1995:84). When I talked with *espiritistas* about the course of their spiritual development and

memories of their relationships to spirits, conversations always related back to guidance from relatives such as mothers or grandmothers. For most of my interlocutors this development also began around María's age. The importance of woman-as-mother that grounds this thesis frames women not just as those who (re)produce culture or identity, but also as those who (re)produce spiritual courses (Hill Collins 2006; Ginsburg and Rapp 1995:2).

Caroline Allen's discussion of Caribbean women and Andaya's work on Cuban women in particular illustrate how women are tasked with biological and social reproduction, which implies that they are also those upon whom the continuation of economic production and the maintenance of societal value systems rest. These examinations suggest, effectively, that the continuation and welfare of the entire society is underpinned by women (Allen 1997: 171; Andaya 2014; Momsen 1991). Allen argues that the burden of production and reproduction single-handedly falls on women (1997: 172). Andaya demonstrates how this burden manifests as reproductive labour in Cuba. In other words, mothering is difficult. While women derive 'status from their ability to manage their households,' it is a 'struggle to provide for one's family through labor in the home, sacrifice and creative negotiation of material shortages and state bureaucracy' (Andaya 2014: 76). Allen and Andaya's arguments were reflected in my experience doing fieldwork, but the claim of the preponderance of responsibility falling on women also included space for women's independence and valorised roles as mothers as a source of joy. Pride in being a mother, however, does not eclipse burdens of daily living falling on women as they often absorb responsibilities ideally taken up by men in addition to their own (Menéndez 1997:175).

Like other religious ideologies that cast women in the role of repositories of knowledge or cultural tradition (cf. Mahmood 2005:118), dynamics of spiritual development as I observed them suggest this is true of *Espiritismo Cruzado*. Cuban women, as is the case for women in many

places, are associated with reproductive labour, which is here understood as the physical, mental, and emotional undertaking 'of bearing, raising, and socializing children and of creating and maintaining households and people (from infancy to old age).' Colen's exploration of stratified reproduction outlines how 'reproductive labour is differentially experienced, valued, and rewarded in particular historical and cultural contexts' (1995: 78). In this context, women and their reproduction are applauded, but in terms of concrete experiences, their value is relatively unrecognised. Below I expand on the notion of 'gift' as applicable to the spiritual capacity of *espiritistas*. The gift is juxtaposed as more 'natural' and 'innate' as compared to initiation rituals required by other religious traditions in the matrix. Again, lack of ritual initiation is often framed positively, or at least productively. At times I heard it discussed as a more 'authentic' and direct spirituality, rooted in feeling rather than accumulation of information. Yet, the strict lines often drawn between gift and initiation are muddled when analysed within the necessary process of spiritual development.

Gift Versus Initiation

Practitioners often talked about a lack of initiation as a distinguishing feature of *Espiritismo.* Instead**,** relevant to practice is the *don,* or gift. The *don*, however, is necessarily underpinned by spiritual development. Developing is applicable to other religious traditions in the matrix but is especially framed as processual and emergent in *Espiritismo* precisely because of this absence of ritual initiation (Garoutte and Wambaugh 2007:140). While interlocutors sometimes insist that the gift is an innate capacity, there is simultaneously the understanding that such a *don* needs to be cultivated through the lifelong aforementioned process of spiritual development.[48] And, while in theory anyone can have the *don*, practitioners are overwhelmingly women.

[48] This complication between initiation and gift is reflected other African diasporic practices as well (Sansi-Roca 2005).

At one point during my fieldwork I remember a novice *espiritista* being told off for not focusing during an *escuelita* (the weekly informal meetings dedicated to spiritual development; see chapter four). One *muerto* declared: 'Your spirits come from your mom's belly!' This *muerto* made the comment to articulate that relationships with *muertos* are a bestowal that you cannot deny, spirits are part of you, and relationships with them must be accepted. But the *muerto*'s words stuck with me as having a broader saliency as well. By linking spiritual capacity to 'your mom's belly,' family is framed in relation to a 'natural' endowment of spirituality. It also alludes to the ethnographically understood relationship between reproduction, gender, nurturance, woman, and mother.

Another interlocutor told me her capacity to communicate with *muertos* was, 'a gift from nature.' She went on to explain: 'This is because not everyone can be an *espiritista*. That is, it is not something achieved. It is not a choice per se.' Still, she made a point of stressing that one did have to make the choice to accept and assimilate this gift by developing it. On one hand, several *espiritistas* spoke about *Espiritismo* as 'inherited' in the sense that they came from families with long ties to *la religión* in general and with *Espiritismo Cruzado* in particular. They argued that this made spiritual development and dispositions towards *Espiritismo Cruzado* and the essential, intimate relationships between living and dead that the practice fosters less difficult and more 'natural.'

Indeed, despite this framework of the *don* as 'natural,' assimilating the gift is not easy and takes time as well as effort. Paraphrasing from Pitt Rivers, who borrows from Ott, a gift like the *don,* is an unmerited bestowal received from the spiritual or divine. The gift manifests in an intimate, collaborative, and reciprocal relationship that relies on all parties to contribute to its attainment (1992:215-246). My interlocutors referenced spiritual capacity as a gift that is diffuse and fluid. This gift/initiation, either/or structure is complicated in practice. While

perhaps not initiation in a ritual sense, processes of development are necessary.

Spiritual development was described to me as an unconscious learning attributed to one's everyday environment. Feeling—including but not limited to emotion—is inherent to the composition of *espiritista*/spirit relationships. There is a schematic of prolonged spiritual work alongside spontaneous moments. This combination indicates that work in communication with *muertos* is reminiscent of Mahmood's argument regarding interiority and exteriority in the enactment of emotion in women's cultivation of pious Islamic selves. Mahmood argues that neat separations of emotional spontaneity and 'disciplined behaviour' cannot be taken for granted as independent expressions of spirituality (2005: 128-135). This point would suggest that in the case of *Espiritismo*, while there might appear to be a contradiction between gift as innate capacity and development as ongoing, the two actually work in tandem. One requires the other.

The gift is latent without development and developing would be moot without the gift. The gift is the foundation upon which spiritual development is necessarily shaped. If Strathern's (1995) words are a starting point, that is, that 'reproduction commonly means to bring into existence something that already exists in another form' (354), reproduction is especially pertinent to *Espiritismo*. Particularly relevant are ideas of reproduction as a kind of regeneration or as a bringing both into and out of the imagination (ibid). This notion of reproduction is apparent in the creative mechanisms of communication and knowledge production between *espiritistas* and spirits. The *don* brings *muertos' caridades* into being. While *muertos* and the knowledge they have pre-exists *espiritistas*, they actualise and (re)produce this knowledge in practice.

Interlocutors explained to me that the nuances of one's ability to work in *Espiritismo* come both in spontaneous moments and in times dedicated to *desarrollando* (spiritually developing) and working with *muertos*. One *espiritista* told me mothering kin were key to spiritual development 'because, if you started hearing voices as a child [or at any age for that matter] you might think you were going crazy—that is of course, if your grandmother were not there to assure you it is perfectly normal and just your spirits trying to communicate with you.' In sharing this with me, the *espiritista* illustrates both the assumed common knowledge that women are tasked with raising children and how roles of spiritual guidance belong to women kin.[49]

That spiritual guidance relevant to working with *muertos* comes from women family members is not just based on my interlocutors' reflections or recollections on the past. This narrative of development was echoed in my observations of small children's engagement with *Espiritismo*. It is typically at 4 or 5 years old when most *espiritistas*' relationships and communications with spirits begin. For example, during work with *muertos*, María would become restless if too much time had gone by and no one had passed (fallen into trance with) a *muerto.* 'Come on people!' she would say mimicking the guttural clicking noises which are the introducing signatures of specific *muertos*. María could be found running about when we sat with *muertos*; she was always present and was desperate to be included.

María would dance as intently and sometimes more enthusiastically than the adults at drumming activities called *cajones* (see chapter five), which highlights skills and abilities cultivated long before children consciously begin to develop as *espiritistas*. She had a tremendous curiosity surrounding ritual objects and when going around the circle or the

[49] This is in contrast to *Santo* wherein a biological parent cannot be a godparent because initiation is a kind of (re)birth. As one *santera* put it: 'You cannot give birth to the same person twice.'

bóveda she would adamantly insist on cleansing herself. María's eagerness reflected that relationships with *muertos* are impregnated at a young age. She had not actively found her footing as an *espiritista* yet, but her capacities, especially her *vista* mentioned above, were both strong and apparent.

I have addressed how spiritual development begins from a young age and blurs the lines between gift and initiation, illustrating what this blurring might mean and look like for my interlocutors. Below, I suggest a parallel between an *espiritista*'s don, or innate capacity, and pregnancy on one hand, and the lifelong process of developing one's spiritual abilities and the actions that make up mothering on the other. This parallel further elaborates the relevancy of mothers and mothering in spiritual development, contributing to the practice's wider feminine codings.

Gift and Developing, Pregnancy and Mothering

Following the multifaceted definition of mothering that Lorde provided this thesis with in the introduction, I suggest that the nurturing of spiritual capabilities is akin to acts of mothering. Mothering defined more basically as child-rearing, at times, also seemed to be a fitting characterisation of the process of spiritual development. It is an active process that is guided by mostly female family members. However, it is important to keep in mind the discussion of gendering a practice that has been laid out and how religious traditions can be gendered beyond or despite the gender identities or demographics of practitioners. That is to say, certain religious traditions and ways of relating can be coded as feminine regardless of who carries them out. Keeping this in mind, both demographics and relationship dynamics highlight the gendering of *Espiritismo* as feminine.

I suggest that just as mothering and *Espiritismo Cruzado* both symbolically mirror one another, they also make each other up.

Espiritismo Cruzado allows for women to mother in particular ways. It allows for boundaries to be set and, importantly, for spirits' guidance and assistance to lessen burdens. These burdens may include the working through of familial or social problems, granting emotional stability and peace of mind, or this guidance and assistance may take the form of practical advice that helps women-as-mothers make ends meet and financially provide. If part of mothering entails 'women mak[ing] life choices around the necessities involved in caring for children' (Andaya 2014:7), then for the reasons mentioned, work with spirits grants a sense of ease to these choices. In turn, a sense of ease via *muertos* contributes to women's abilities to fulfil their roles as mothers and provide. Working with *muertos* supplements the ingenuity and crafty resourcefulness women-as-mothers are perceived to have.

To reiterate, as Andaya writes of post-Soviet Cuba, 'motherhood is not just predicated on the biological act of parturition' (2014:76). Giving birth alone does not make a mother, much like the gift alone does not make an *espiritista*. For example, women derive status from their ability to manage their households, and *espiritistas* negotiate their identities through spiritual development. *Desarrollando*, like mothering, is something that is ongoing and that requires other actors. Once one's pregnancy, or gift, is accepted, one can dedicate themselves to mothering or *desarrollando*.

While pregnancy is a state that needs to be achieved and sustained, and does require a man, it is still perceived as an innate capacity that women hold. On Mother's Day, I receive gifts despite not having children (for a similar ethnographic encounter see Andaya 2014:74). Though appreciative, upon receiving my first Mother's Day gift, I explained I was not a mother. I was told that did not matter. It was not a question of not having children, it was that I did not *yet* have children. For most of the Cubans I know, it is not only that women *should* be mothers, it is that they *would* be mothers, as though being a mother were a 'natural,' latent ability and realisation is dependent on time rather than choice or any

other circumstance. While women who are not your biological mother can mother you, interlocutors described pregnancy as necessary for motherhood.

Ideas of naturalness reproduce gendered narratives. Perceptions of trance as an innate form of embodied knowledge production for women serves to gender practice and practitioners. Similarly, the notion of a *don* or gift as a more 'natural' connection with religiosity (than ritual initiation) parallels the idea of being a mother as 'natural' and inevitable role for women. That being said, all of the *espiritistas* that I worked with have biological children[50] and only one *religiosa* I worked with, Lydia, could think of a female *espiritista* who had not given birth to children. Below I include an excerpt from a conversation we shared:

> Aly: Might there be some kind of relationship between *Espiritismo* and fertility? Because neither I, nor anyone else I know, can think of an *espiritista* without children.
>
> Lydia: Yes, I know a few *espiritistas* that are not mothers, but for a reason—not everyone that comes to this world is meant to have children. But they can collect [informally adopt] children, be a mother by a different means, not by their own wombs. One example: I have been in a place working [with *muertos*] and they said to someone, 'Look, you a never going to have children. You are going to be one of the few women who will not give birth.' Ahh, ok, what happened? Her sister had a son and she raised it; she was his mother.

As seen above, mothering can be done by others. While the above example refers to an aunt-as-mother, this mothering can extend beyond biological kin. As Osirim writes of Caribbean women from a variety of class backgrounds: 'While women in the region are not all parents, the centrality of motherhood is and remains a focal aspect of self-identity for Caribbean women. Even those who are not biological mothers often

[50] As I said in the introduction, all female *espiritistas* I worked with are heterosexual. I know only one queer *religiosa* who is not a biological mother. Most queer women I knew had biological children from previous heterosexual relationships.

assume the role of "surrogate" mothers for children in the community' (1997:43). Yet, at same time, there is still emphasis placed on one's *real* (read 'natural') mother.

Once, when discussing potentially adopting children, my Cuban mother said, 'But Aly, they would not *really* be yours. *No serán tuyos, tuyos en sangre, tuyos en carne y hueso* [Not *yours,* not yours in flesh and blood]. And being a mother is a woman's greatest joy.' I contested these ideas of 'real' family (pointing out, after all, I was not *really* her daughter) and she insisted adoption was not the same as birthing your own children. While we agreed to disagree, this exchange emphasises notions of realness or naturalness; it demonstrates the apparent importance of an embodied connection between mother and child and reinforces the widespread prominence of mothers and mothering in the Cuban context. As with practicing *la religión*, there is at once a rigidity and porosity to mothering. While the analogies of gift to pregnancy and developing to motherhood are my own analysis, several interlocutors alluded to links between pregnancy and trance. Below I unpack the dynamic between these two embodied phenomena and begin to interrogate the limitations of this metaphoric relationship.

Limits

My ethnographic data regarding the relationship between a shared body in trance and pregnancy was generally circumscribed to my interlocutors' metaphor as I did not meet any pregnant *espiritistas* during my fieldwork. Below, however, I begin to explore women's narratives of practice during pregnancy. I further demonstrate practitioners' views on the open body and when and how it can be a liability and for whom. The diversity in practitioners' responses regarding the relationship between trance and pregnancy further emphasises the individualised nature of *Espiritismo*. Some related that they worked with *muertos* until the later months of their pregnancies. Others, however, claimed that a pregnant woman could

not fall into trance but could work with spirits via other avenues One *religiosa* said:

> A pregnant woman cannot [fall into trance], when she is pregnant she cannot incorporate a spirit, because, well, that is too rough. Maybe if the spirit comes gently but if the spirit comes roughly it will hurt the little one and the girl. So, one sits, and *muertos* direct through feeling, through sight, 'I see this, that, the other.' But when you are pregnant you cannot do it, not at the beginning and not when you are bigger; you could lose the belly [pregnancy.]

The above *espiritista* seemed to relate to the material reality of pregnancy physiologically. Often *muertos se monta* (come) roughly, even violently. As such, barring particularly responsible *muertos*, she felt trance could be a risk to the mother and child. Many *espiritista* mentioned that they personally worked through sight and feeling but, if your *muertos* came responsibly and you could pass them seated, calmly, trance would not pose a problem. One practitioner told me, 'They know when you are with child or recently operated so they come softly, gently. They know they cannot grab an *espiritista* roughly when she has just had an operation, is sick, or pregnant.'

While several women told me they did not fully begin *desarrollando* until after their children were born, Odalis is one such practitioner who had been developing prior to becoming pregnant and continued to work via trance until the later stages of her pregnancy. She told me about her experiences:

> When one is pregnant, one can fall into trance up to a certain time. In the first months one can work [with *muertos*] normally, no problem. They, because they are yours, they know what condition you are in. They take care of you. What's more, it's a good energy, we do this in part to cleanse ourselves. The energy helps us, it alleviates things when it comes time to give birth. When you're 9 months or you have a high-risk pregnancy and you're on bed rest, that's a different story. If not, one can work with *muertos* until they are more or less 6 or 7 months pregnant. But [falling into trance] is nothing bad, work with *muertos* gives you

> energy that helps facilitate the birth. It's better for you; you are absorbing and collecting positive energy from your spirits. They're helping you. I worked with spirits normally during both my pregnancies and that helped me a lot when I gave birth because when you are in labour you don't want to have any complications.

While many practitioners framed the relationship between pregnancy and trance as 'you can' or 'you can't' fall into trance, it was clear to me that, unsurprisingly, it depends.

Apart from irresponsible *muertos* who did not take proper care with their *caballos*, most practitioners of *Espiritismo* felt that trance—and the open body needed to achieve it—were indicative of positive energy. When I inquired about a possible negative side of trance or the open body for *espiritistas*, perhaps in relation to pregnancy, one *religiosa* offered an unexpected example:

> I have an example of something negative, but it is not through passing *muertos*, not through trance. But
> the worst harm there is, is when you eat or drink
> something. If you ingest something through your body from negative *brujería* that has to do with *muertos oscuros* [dark spirits], you can go crazy. Yes, this does exist, and it can harm you! I have a cousin—he died from something else—but this cousin damaged a girl, if you know what I mean. I don't know if she ended up pregnant or not because I was not close to him, but he made that girl a woman. And after he was ready to leave her. Naturally, her family was not in favour of the relationship. They thought he was shameless and brazen. But they didn't openly declare war on him, instead they invited him to their house. And he went, and there he drank coffee. And in that coffee, they had prepared a work of harmful *brujería*. Shortly after, he went insane. But that's from the *brujería* in the coffee, not from falling into trance. That could happen to anyone, not just an *espiritista*, not just a woman, any person.

This interlocutor did not locate vulnerability in womanhood, nor did she mention an *espiritista*'s open body falling into trance. Instead, in this example, the danger that led to suffering happened to a man who was not an *Espiritismo* practitioner. In fact, without any judgment on its

veracity, I read this story as akin to an allegory that may warn men off from mis-treating women.

I also inquired with Odalis about suffering in relation to *muertos* and passing them through an open, susceptible body. When I asked, 'Can the open body be dangerous? We talk a lot about the good things about falling into trance, because [*muertos*] help us a lot, but the other side of the coin is *muertos oscuros*. Can [falling into trance with *muertos oscuros*] be a vulnerability too?' She replied:

> Yes, oh, yes, yes of course *muertos oscuros*. You have seen us pickup *muertos oscuros* many times. Look, when you pick up a *muerto oscuro* you get stronger, because you and your spirits need to work more. It's good. Whoever may send a *muerto oscuro* to the house, but we sit, and pick them up and pass them with the help of our spirits so the *muertos oscuros* can move forward to either be liberated or face their actions. Remember how I told you the first time you sat with us that you cannot cross your legs? You cannot cross your legs because it closes you off to energy—whether that is really the case or whether that is tradition I cannot say but you cannot close yourself off. You need to be open to things.

Above Odalis underscores the importance of an open body. She suggests that even when *muertos* are 'dark'— sometimes sent from others through *brujería* to do works of harm, sometimes through circumstances of their deaths—they can strengthen both your capacity as an *espiritista* and help your own spirits evolve. Odalis felt it was her duty to help *muertos oscuros* move forward in their trajectories as well. 'It's up to you and your spirits to grant them light,' she continued. Odalis seemed to gesture to the open permeability of an *espiritista's* body as necessary and productive. The open body is not a liability, but a capacity derived from a combination of the *don* and experience gained through spiritually developing. The body's permeability to *muertos oscuros* fortifies an *espiritista*'s spiritual strength. Because the body is porous, shared material, an *espiritista*'s own spirits are already within her body. Unlike other spiritual or religious contexts, it is not closure (cf. Mayblin 2010: 74-80) that is linked to spiritual well-being, rather it is general openness

that is linked to spiritual strength. Simply put, an open body is not only a worthy, strong body, it provides opportunities to become stronger as well.

While there are obvious differences in temporal scales and social stakes, I have suggested that pregnancy can serve as a parallel to the *don* and actively mothering as a parallel to spiritual development. When practitioners speak about the embodied, material reality of being pregnant, metaphoric links between trance and pregnancy are often eclipsed by the actual condition of pregnancy and the logistics of *Espiritismo* practice. In this subsection I have also addressed the potential vulnerabilities that my interlocutors perceived (or did not perceive) in an *espiritista*-as-woman's porous body. The use of the *espiritista*'s body as shared material that allows for collaborative work is predicated on permeable boundaries. Several actors overlap in one body. This mixture of spiritual actors is one of the most prominent examples of mixing or blurring in *Espiritismo*. Below, I examine another point of mixture, a blurring between those who mother you and those who guide you in your spiritual development.

Overlapping Family

The distinction practitioners emphasise between ritual initiation and innate gift is muddled through the process of spiritual development. If it is known that spiritual capacity relies equally on both lifelong processes of development as much as ideas of innate capabilities, what does such development look like and who takes part in it? I argue it is your family—particularly elders from previous generations like mothers, grandmothers, aunts, etc.—who pass down the tools necessary for learning to cultivate spiritual capacity. The guidance that manifests in the processes of spiritual development parallels mothering and also points to the number of people—mostly women—who take part in raising a child. Because

spiritual development is a continual, sustained undertaking, guidance or mothering pertinent to it is also ongoing.

By examining some key moments in Claudia's spiritual development, I demonstrate the way that biological family and spiritual family overlap in practice. After riding the P6 bus to Odalis' house in the Luyano neighbourhood of the municipality Diez de Octubre, I was exhausted. I arrived to find everyone else equally lethargic from the heat. Still, we all knew we had to sit and work with the *muertos*, and I was told that my arrival that afternoon was the incentive to get going. We arranged chairs in the passageway nestled between the front room and the small kitchen where we sat to hold our *escuelitas*. As on a few other occasions around the house, Odalis wore her hair in makeshift curlers made from toilet rolls.

This ability to make do with what is available is a quintessential exemplification of the Cuban notion of *inventar*, again, getting by however one can. As outlined previously, and though relevant to all Cubans I know, *inventar* has a special applicability to mothers as providers. Mothers are meant to be especially strong and resourceful (Osirim 1997:55). Echoing the introduction's discussion of mothers-as-hustlers, Andaya writes of Cuban motherhood, again, as a 'presumptively "natural" feminine accomplishment' but also as 'a complex array of consciously and unconsciously crafted strategies' (2014:104). Mothers are presented as those who are capable, who can manage economic adversity, who have strong and culturally rewarding identities (ibid), and who know how to *inventar* or hustle. Indeed, just as important as the notions of *espiritista*-as-woman or woman-as-mother, is the archetype of mother-as-hustler.

We sat. Odalis had placed the cloth that belonged to her and Ines' mother on her lap. The cloth had spiritual potency associated with their late mother and all of the spirits that comprised her *cuadro espiritual*. With

the use of her cloth, Ines and Odalis' deceased mother was, in a way, also playing a part and taking care of the family after her death. Despite having begun our work, Claudia was filing her nails as she balanced María on her lap. She also lifted my hand and scrutinised it to see what condition I had let my nails fall into. To provide additional income to her state salary as a school teacher, Claudia did nails.

When Odalis opened her eyes and glanced over to see Claudia inspecting my nails, Odalis reprimanded her – quite harshly I thought – for not focusing. Harsh scolding by older women may reverberate with ideas of motherhood and strength. The severe attitude to Claudia that both Odalis and Ines had is very much akin to mothering as it was framed to me. The strictness of Ines (Claudia's mother) and Odalis (mothering kin) was for Claudia's wellbeing. Odalis and Ines reasoned that such sharpness is required to make sure Claudia stays on track and progresses as much as her path allows.

Occasional toughness or harshness is in some cases preferenced over overt affection or tenderness and is not indicative of a lack of love. Rather, these qualities serve to demonstrate strong, loving attachments and a devotion to children's wellbeing. Harsh words and tough love are for Claudia's own benefit. Crucial to the family dynamics that unfold in *Espiritismo Cruzado* is a focus on maternal relationships of nurturance and guidance. Yet, importantly, nurturance or guidance is often manifested more in terms of discipline and responsibility than gentleness. Ines and Odalis' guidance in Claudia's spiritual development also happened in relation to Claudia navigating dissatisfaction with her job, her lack of a partner at the time, and a displeasure with her looks (see chapter six).

Although Claudia was *rayada* and had *cofa de Ifá*[51], she was still a novice *religiosa* and had far to go in her spiritual development as an *espiritista.* Additionally, in her eventual course as a practitioner of *la religión,* Claudia was meant to *hacerse Santo* (initiate in *Santo*, literally 'make *Santo*') sooner rather than later when enough money had been *inventado* as a daughter of Yemayá, the *oricha* of the ocean. As mentioned, Yemayá is considered the great maternal force and thus, being the mother of everything, watches over all things and people. She is syncretised with La Virgen de Regla in Catholicism and with the *mpungo*, the Bantu-Kongo deity, Madre Agua in *Palo.* On numerous occasions, Claudia was told that she could have a bright future if she dedicated herself to her spiritual development. Ines reiterated this point.

Claudia responded that the spirits were not communicating anything to her. Ines told her that her spirits would not communicate with her and would not say anything as long as she was so distracted. Odalis agreed with Ines, and she said to Claudia, 'Girl, that is not how this works. Get to it, here and now.' I felt bad for Claudia as it seemed to me she was being attacked and I said aloud, gesturing to a now sleeping María, 'Well it cannot be easy, with a little one on your lap.' Neither Ines nor Odalis agreed; both rejected my defence.

'The girl is sleeping, she [referring to Claudia] needs to put her down on the bed and concentrate properly,' Odalis informed me. Everyone persisted in their prodding. Odalis then urged Claudia to at least close her eyes.

'When I feel something,' Claudia responded.

[51] *Cofa de ifá* refers to a gender specific ritual for women which puts them formally under the care of Orula, different to initiation in *Ifá*. Often cited as a precursor for women to *hacerse Santo* (initiating in *Santo*).

To this Odalis said, 'Oh, because you know better than them (spirits), than him (Claudia's *muerto principal)*? Ines and Odalis approached Claudia's spiritual development with an acknowledgment that they know better. (Although, of course, spirits know best.) 'Go refresh yourself in front of the *bóveda*,' Odalis said ordering Claudia to cleanse herself. Finally listening to Odalis, Claudia silently complied and then returned to her seat and closed her eyes. Shortly after she began to sway, and her knees began to shake with so much force that things fell from the dresser she leant against.

This power of closing your eyes harkens back to the erotic, understood here as a kind of creative power and source of knowledge. The erotic as an embodied power goes beyond just doing, but what is felt in the doing (2007 [1984]: 54) in a way that applies to processes of spiritual development. The erotic is the 'measure between the beginning of our sense of self and the chaos of our strongest feelings' (ibid). That is to say, it is the knowing and honing through chaos of one's capacity to feel, emotionally and sensorially, a complete sense of self for a purpose. Lorde writes: 'The aim of each thing which we do is to make our lives and the lives of our children richer and more possible. Within the celebration of the erotic in all our endeavours, my work becomes a conscious decision' (ibid 55).

It is more than just the act of shutting one's eyes and more than just the sensation of closing them, but fully, acutely, and consciously investing meaning and feeling in shutting them to work with *muertos* for improving one's life and, by extension, the life of one's children. When it comes to communicating with *muertos*, these micro-bodily actions and behaviours such as closing eyes are just as important as the large-scale experiences of trance. The former can allow for the latter. If, as detailed above, the erotic is the measure between one's sense of self, and the chaos of one's feelings, the erotic parallels spiritual capacity because it bridges one's *don* with a sense of being an *espiritista*.

Ines advised Claudia: 'with control…' The care taken in advising or reminding Claudia to maintain a relaxed control over her body until she ceded it to her *muerto* also demonstrates the links between caring for the living and caring for the dead. Implicitly signalling to mothering, Seremetakis (1991) describes the way responsibilities of nurturing and preserving the living exists alongside a similar responsibility to the dead.

José Francisco arrived. During his brief presentation (refers to the *muertos' caridad* enacted with *espiritistas*; the duration of their communication) he, Ines, and Odalis discussed that although José Francisco is the wisest of the three, they all needed to work together to help Claudia. When he left, Ines instructed Claudia to go cleanse in front of the *bóveda* and say a *padre nuestro*. Claudia did as she was told and mouthed the words of the *padre nuestro* to herself, again, with eyes shut softly. She then announced to us that we should go around the circle and each cleanse with perfume. 'That's it!' Odalis exclaimed, pleased.

Training allows for communication with spirits to manifest more clearly and for you to apprehend *caridades* better. Once you are conditioned to spiritual practice, you no longer have to try as consciously. We continued. Each of us arose and stood in front of Claudia. At first, she was unsure. She blew smoke from her tobacco on a bouquet of nearly shrivelled flowers, then spat *aguardiente* forcefully onto it. Claudia proceeded to ask permission of our spirits and then began to strike us with the bouquet, effectively swatting away negativity. She then spun us one by one, once clockwise and counter clockwise.

When it was my turn, we exchanged smiles. Hers seemed to say to say, 'I hope I am doing this right!' And mine, despite coming from a place of far greater ignorance, reassured her 'You are doing fine.' She asked Odalis and Ines if she was doing things correctly; they gave her nods of approval. Listening to mothering kin pays off. After all, once Claudia

followed Odalis and Ines' directions, she was able to pass José Francisco and afterward she was able to discern a need for us to *despojar*.

Spiritual development is in large part up to one's *muertos* who hold far more power than practitioners. Yet alongside spirits, one's family, especially mothers or mothering kin like aunts, grandmothers, etc., also play a big part in guiding the process of an *espiritista's* spiritual cultivation. This guidance ensures that an *espiritista* knows where to begin in developing, to make sure her spiritual path is followed, and her potential realised.

Raising a Child

I elaborate on the links between raising a child and the responsibility a mother has in her child's spiritual development. I suggest these dual processes of mothering cannot be divorced from one another in the context of *Espiritismo Cruzado.* Their overlapping extends to a mother's own spiritual development as well. I observed that working with *muertos* and developing spiritually helped mothers in a practical sense. I will show how these two iterations of mothering are dispersed amongst different actors (cf. Strathern 1995), occur across generations and continue on into adulthood.

In addition to the *escuelitas* I attended at Odalis' home, Claudia and I both attended another in Centro Habana. The scale of this *escuelita* was bigger. There was a greater number of people in attendance; there would be up to or sometimes even more than twenty people. On one evening Claudia arrived late. Bringing young children along was common and on this evening, Claudia had brought María.
When children were present, they would typically either sit quietly and watch the spiritual work or play nearby outside in the streets. On occasion they would whisper or pass the time trying to get the attention of their mothers and aunties. Some children would play games on adults'

cell phones, making soft beeping noises when they keyed their moves. Women who were still breastfeeding continued spiritual practice as normal as they nursed, receiving and sharing *muertos*' communication via sight, sound or intuition/sensitivity. And as children got more comfortable and the singing livelier, sometimes one or two would get up and dance in the middle of the circle formed by participants' chairs.

One *espiritista* addressed the group. She was young, White, and outspoken. The bulk of my interlocutors were outspoken women, but I saw her as an intimidating figure. The woman was dressed in all white—something very typical of *religiosos* when engaging in religious or spiritual activities. (White clothing is especially the case for *santeros* or *espiritistas.)* The *espiritista* wore white leggings, a long-sleeved shirt, and a white handkerchief in her hair. She began to speak to Claudia about María.

'I see this little girl in front of Eleggúa, dancing and singing. She has a lot to do with Yemayá and Oyá.[52] I see her singing and playing with a skirt. You, because you are her mother, need to have a party for Eleggúa and the little girl. It does not have to be big; it can be a simple party. But I do see a *piñata* with all the candy showering her.'

María took no notice that she was the topic of conversation, instead her attention was focused on browsing through photos on my mobile phone. Claudia appeared to be listening attentively, though, and nodded to confirm what was said. The woman went on, 'One day, eventually, because maybe you think she is too young now, but eventually this little girl is going to have to receive *cofa de Ifá* and possibly even *rayarse,*

[52] Oyá, a female warrior *oricha,* is associated with wind and air. She is also associated with *Espiritismo Cruzado.* Being the *dueña* (owner, caretaker) of the cemetery, she has a lot to do with *muertos.* Perhaps another nod to the relationship between women, birth, life, and death.

because she has a spirit that has to do with Sarabanda.[53] You have to naturalise *la religión* for her. This will end up being subconscious, it will become so normal.' The *espiritista* reminded Claudia of her responsibility to guide María in her spiritual path, especially at her young age— 'you, because you are her mother.'

Mothering meant a dual role. Alongside raising María as a child, Claudia needed to raise her appropriately as a soon-to-be developing *espiritista*. What is indicated is that, for *espiritistas,* mothering includes a designated spiritual responsibility. This process was already at work*; la religión* was an important part, perhaps inadvertently, of María's upbringing. Like spiritually developing, fulfilling this responsibility suggests that being a mother is a position one has to live up to. This example reflects the trajectory mothering takes and highlights an example of spiritual development as both part of mothering and a dynamic that mirrors it.

The woman continued on, underscoring María's potential, 'This little girl is a star. She is going to be a star. I see her *gitana* and she has tremendous astral strength; I see her with her hair down in front of a mirror playing with a skirt.' Claudia told her that yes, she loved to do this. The *espiritista* said, 'but that is not her, that is the inclination of the *gitana*. Yes, she likes to dance because of her.'

From a young age, it is evident that the line between *espiritista* and spirit are murky. Spirits intrinsically make up selves (Espirito Santo 2015a). Unlike *Santo*, where a person is a child of an *oricha*, *muertos* engage as agents who comprise a person-as-self. That is, an *espiritista* is made of the spirits in her *cuadro espiritual*, something that is further demonstrated and interrogated at different points of the thesis (see chapter six and chapter seven).

[53] Sarabanda is an *mpungo* of *Palo*. He is syncretised with the *oricha* Ogún. He is a warrior and hunter associated with iron tools and sometimes violence.

Just as 'reproduction cannot occur in the absence of a certain kind of knowledge—that is knowledge about the identity of others' (Strathern 1995:354) neither can *Espiritismo Cruzado* practice occur in the absence of a certain kind of knowledge. That is, regarding the identity of *muertos* and the capacities these spirits have and can allow for. One's *cuadro espiritual* is highly relevant to ideas of self-constitution; it refers to the group of *muertos* who are involved in your life. As touched upon previously, this group of *muertos* act to protect, guide, and work for you.

Espirito Santo writes of this, 'Selfhood begins not as a priori cultural models of being that are subsequently followed to completion in various ways but rather more as logics of "becoming"' (2015a: xii). The composition of self-as-*muertos*, however, does not negate *muertos* as full selves in their own right. While *orichas* are the mothers or fathers of many, your *muertos* are yours alone. Like in most other contexts, *Espiritismo Cruzado* posits that persons are defined through the relational matrices they pertain to. In these ways, spirits make up *espiritistas*. However, I contend that the living practitioners who nurture an *espiritista's* spiritual development contribute as well.

Another *espiritista* jumped in, asking Claudia if she had saved anything from when María was a baby. Claudia said she still had María's hospital wristband from when she was born. She never threw it away. Claudia was told to put it on top of her own representation of Eleggúa. As Eleggúa is the *oricha* associated with children and childhood, he is uniquely qualified to watch over María. Placing the wristband on his representation signals a tripartite engagement between Eleggúa, the wristband, and María. This would all be via Claudia's Eleggúa and spiritual energy.

The energy of all would exist together in this compilation of object-living person-spirit. While Eleggúa is the key actor in this scenario, and by far the most potent, the *espiritistas* are not inconsequential. An *espiritista's*

spiritual trajectory and energy may seem independent from others, but in this scenario a mother's works in tandem with her child's. This too signals again to a spiritual responsibility, however this time beyond guidance and cultivation, rather, more in terms of what is at stake for a mother's own spiritual progression in relation to its influence on her child. The spiritual course of one is reflected in the other, pointing to mothers' duty in the effects of her spiritual path in mother/child relationships. If Claudia proved slack in this work, it may directly impact María's spiritual trajectory.

The woman concluded, 'This little girl has tremendous spirituality, more than her mother,' speaking both to and about Claudia, 'and the mother has a lot of spirituality. I see the spirit of an adolescent in'—she asked María's name— 'in María's *cuadro espiritual*. About 11 or 12 years old, naughty—a trickster. But for good! This spirit will help the little girl progress a lot. Is her *cuadro espiritual* formally defined? —No? She is just little, probably not yet?' she asked Claudia.

By formally defined, this practitioner was asking if María, or rather Claudia on behalf of María, had taken steps to ascertain the spirits who made up María's *cuadro espiritual*. Claudia replied no. The *espiritista's* mention of María' spirituality being stronger than Claudia's seemed to point to a relationship between spiritual capacity as it is passed down from mother to daughter. In the case of María and Claudia, with the former's supposedly eventually surpassing the latter's. The advice Claudia received in the *escuelita* demonstrates the way that her and María's spiritual paths and progress are intertwined. Claudia's responsibility as María's mother was to indoctrinate her with a normalised understanding of *Espiritismo Cruzado* and *la religión* more generally. It was Claudia's charge to ensure that María would be able to fulfil her potential as a *religiosa*.

Mothering as responsibility is emphasised in this interaction and the interactions from the previous section. Children are responsible to mothers and mothering kin, spirits are responsible for and responsive to *espiritistas,* and mothers are responsible for children. Despite the significance of this example, in the case of María, mothering may have been done more by Ines, and especially Odalis, than Claudia. Ines and Odalis had worries about Claudia, which were understood to be linked to a failure to adhere to her spiritual path. I would learn that these worries extended to Claudia as a mother. Odalis' concerns grew to the point that we went to her cousin, Richard, a *babalawo* for advice. I sat with Odalis and Richard at his kitchen table.

Odalis told him they needed to do something for Claudia. Richard gave her a long look and waited for her to explain herself in more detail. Odalis then told him that Claudia needed to get in line so that she could develop spiritually and be ready to progress and *hacerse Santo*. She continued:

> It is not just that, she is crazy, she leaves María for me to take care of. When she is around, she loses her temper and María is learning from this and acts it out with her doll [I witnessed this]. She has no patience. I raise the girl, but when I tell Claudia that she needs to be at home and raise her daughter, she tells me I cannot say anything to her because I am not her mother.
>
> But I am the one there. Claudia sends the little girl to school without eating anything, without drinking any milk. She does not give her a snack when she gets home from school. The little girl is hungry, so I do this. She does not have a bedtime, so she is tired and cannot concentrate. So, I tell her when she must go to sleep.
>
> And she [Claudia] is not just at work! She is not *luchando* [struggling, striving, fighting] in other ways. The man she is seeing is married—he is not going take care of her, he is not going maintain them. He has a family. She is not thinking.

I felt Odalis was not being entirely fair to Claudia in her interpretation of events. For example, Claudia worked two jobs (most Cubans work a minimum of two or three jobs which has become necessary due to the changes in Cuba's management of its socialist particularities in the post-

Soviet historical moment) and seemed to sincerely be doing her best to make financial ends meet. Nevertheless, upon hearing Odalis, Richard agreed to officiate an activity in the new year, one that would cool, cleanse, and calm Claudia. Richard's activity would serve the dual function of spiritual progress thus bringing her closer to her preparations continue on her *camino* and *hacerse Santo* and also help her to be a better mother. Odalis was relieved.

Historically, across Black diaspora, and especially in dialogue with class, there is a 'belief in the importance of motherhood and the value of cooperative approaches to child care' (Hill Collins 2000[1990]: 181). Mothers rely on aunts, sisters, and grandmothers to create the appropriate conditions for raising their children. Maternal responsibility of nurturing is distributed so that economic needs may be met (Andaya 2014: 103). Andaya mentions an interlocutor of hers commenting that for women to be able to earn money, often 'women's households continue on the backs of their mothers' (ibid 89).

The question of who socialises children in the Cuban context, relies on an extended network of family (Safa 2005:327). These are mostly women, though not necessarily biological mothers or even strictly blood kin like community othermothering in other contexts (Hill Collins 2000[1990]). These networks contribute to a relative elasticity of those who rear children. While Odalis raising María would be acceptable under some conditions, because Odalis felt Claudia's absence was not the result of her trying to provide for her daughter, Odalis understood Claudia as effectively neglecting her duties. In ensuring Claudia properly mothers María, Odalis mothers them both. And yet, Claudia cites the fact that Odalis is her aunt, not her biological mother, as her rationalisation for not falling in line.

It seemed that the problem Odalis had with Claudia, at least presented above, boiled down to how to mother best. For example, importantly,

Odalis did not frame Claudia's actions of participating in another person's infidelity as a question of morality. The problem, instead, was that Claudia was not following the popular ideas of *luchar* and *inventar* (fighting; struggling; inventing; getting by). There was not necessarily something immoral or wrong about seeing a married man, though it might be frowned upon. Rather, as a mother, it was not smart as he would already be 'taking care of' (financially supporting) the children he had with his wife, and any children his wife may have from previous relationships. This ethnographic example also leads to a question that may provide a more rounded picture of family as it is relevant to my interlocutors. Below I explore the way fathers, as those who aid mothers, often factor into family and raising children. In this brief exploration of fathers, I am also able to shed light on some religious parallels that can be made with their roles.

Fathers

Cualquiera puede ser padre; la madre es una sola.

The above Cuban saying, 'Anyone can be a father; a mother is one and only,' again points to the centrality of mothers. If *espiritistas* are framed like mothers, unique or special owed to their gift of spiritual capacity, where does that leave fathers? Whilst again this refrain appears to point to the supposed naturalness ascribed to these roles, the phrase also emphasises the importance of mothers and diminishes the role of fathers. Yet, though men were not the anchors of family, they were also not necessarily peripheral to the household.

The other side of the matrifocal coin in Caribbean kinship discussions has been the figure of the alienated or marginal father. Rather than contribute to longstanding anthropological and wider social science legacies that frame fatherhood, and especially Black fatherhood, in this way, I invoke another idiom: 'If you have bought the cow, you have bought the calf.' I

first learned of this saying when it was used by a friend. She was referencing her partner's obligation to financially support her children from a previous relationship.

Having a child marks an important step in life for Cuban men and women. Fatherhood affirms masculinity and parenthood signals adulthood (see Härkönen 2016). Marriage, however, was far less important for my interlocutors. Having a romantic partner, to whatever degree of commitment was important (ibid), and people in long-term relationships would often refer to each other as 'husband' or 'wife.' However, I observed the importance of romantic relationships and the titles of 'husband' and 'wife' as playing more into ideas of gender complementarity and less into a prescribed legal-moral framework of family.

Legal marriage is uncommon amongst the Cubans I know, and most people have several long-term relationships in their lives. Successful relationships are said to result in children (see Härkönen 2016:128). The importance of reproduction more broadly is also emphasised by this idea that coupling should result in children. Having several-long term relationships means that people frequently have children with different partners. I observed that men are expected to financially provide for their current wives' children.[54] Men who provided for both their partners' children and children they fathered were considered to be going above and beyond and were often praised. Yet, men who only provided for children they fathered were understood as negligent. This setup does not echo ideas of fathers as wholly absent or irresponsible, as many have contested (among them Reddock 1996; Philogene Heron 2017) but is rather a question of how responsibility is organised and who owes what to whom. This framework of fatherhood also seems to be the direct inverse of the biological rooting of mothers.

[54] There are laws of child support included in the Family Code, but they seemed to rarely be taken into consideration in everyday life.

Interestingly, Odalis went to her cousin, a *babalawo,* for help. As touched upon, numerous interlocutors described to me the commercialisation of *la religión*, something I observed most prominently within *Ocha/Ifá.* Potentially due to the practice as a source of income, there was a massive increase of young men initiating in *Ifá.* The increase in *babalawos*, who sometimes emphasise their roles as paternal leaders or exemplars, might offer a perspective on the attitude of special mothers versus dime-a-dozen fathers. Odalis was not solely seeking different religious or ritual expertise from her own. In addition to a kind of gendered division of spiritual labour, Richard, especially as a *babalawo,* had more material resources and could therefore do more to assist Odalis. This example gestures toward how mothering can be made easier by particular resources that 'fathers' contribute. Alongside Cuban family being mother centred (Safa 2005), there are also strong ideologies of gender complementarity (Bott 1968 [1957]; Smith 1996:44, 54).

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the spiritual development that happens under the guidance of the all-important maternal figures at the core of Cuban family (Safa 2009; see also Härkönen 2016). In doing so, I have addressed concrete dynamics that shed light on what families mean and how they live together. I have demonstrated the way intergenerational relationships between close kin are essential to both raising children and developing as an *espiritista*. I intimated above, like *muertos*, mothers and mothering kin guide, help, and in some cases prevent bad things from coming to pass. Spirits and mothers alike prepare you, discipline you, and train you. Both are caring and provide on one hand, and on the other hand are strong and slightly dangerous to displease.

In order for *religiosos* to have this kind of access to spirits, they emphasised the importance of a gift or capacity that must exist

intrinsically for *Espiritismo Cruzado* practice. Yet people also demonstrated that spiritual development— a continuous process of cultivation—is necessary as well. This cultivation reveals the ambiguity of the concepts of gift and initiation as categories of discrete oppositions. Importantly, the reason initiation is perceived of as irrelevant, in contrast to other practices in *la religión,* is because the *don* is seen as naturally given. I have suggested parallels between the *don* and spiritual development and women's supposedly natural capacities of reproduction and mothering. Alongside an overwhelming number of practitioners being women, the idea of a natural, innate capacity and the relevant processes of spiritual development also coincide with the popular gendering of *Espiritismo Cruzado* as feminine. Also, different to other practices in *la religión*, in typical cases it is mothers, aunts, grandmothers, great aunts, etc. who explicitly take on the task of helping a novice spiritually develop.

I showed how the overlap between those responsible for raising children and those who aid in cultivating a practitioner's development both necessitates and produces mothers and mothering kin as skilled caregivers. The specific conditions necessary to developing spiritually are nursed by particular familial-social worlds. In elaborating on spiritual development, what I showed also forms a backdrop to the thesis' examination of the embodied meanings, skills, and dispositions relevant to the practical orientation of *Espiritismo Cruzado* practice.

Framings of reproduction are applicable to the processes and dynamics of *Espiritismo Cruzado*. This applicability is evident in the practice's forms of knowledge production/communication with spirits and *espiritistas'* journeys of spiritual development. I have illustrated that a network of people that contribute to one's practice. An *espiritista*, her *muertos*, and those around her all take part in the process of developing her spiritual capacities. I have introduced this network primarily through family. In the following chapter, I build off conversations regarding spiritual

development to examine *escuelitas* as spaces that provide opportunities for collaborative knowledge production and witnessing that validate *espiritistas'* spiritual capacities.

Chapter Four: *Escuelitas*

'The fact of the matter is that there is no other work but the work of creating and re-creating ourselves within the context of community' (Alexander 2005:283).

Introduction

This quote from M. Jacqui Alexander's work regarding 'African-based cosmological systems' (ibid 290) indicates something resonant and important for this thesis, the 'fundamental interdependence' (ibid 285), that I found crucially underlies *la religión* and specifically *Espiritismo Cruzado*. This chapter discusses *escuelitas* as a space that demonstrates this fundamental interdependence in its various shades. *Escuelitas*, weekly meetings held amongst spiritual families, are designed to help *espiritistas* spiritually develop and work with *muertos*. Holding *escuelitas* with such frequency naturalises them into routine, unlike activities undertaken at the behest of *muertos* or another *espiritistas*' prompting (see chapter five). *Escuelitas* are spaces wherein *espiritistas* learn to express and recognise communications from spirits, but also, crucially, learn to *trust* these expressions and feelings. Spiritual development in *escuelitas* points to how spiritual capacity and identities of *espiritistas* are developed collectively. For these reasons, I draw attention to *escuelitas* as spaces dedicated to erotic knowledge production.

The literal translation of *escuelitas*, 'little schools,' is in some ways an apt one. While there are not clear roles or standardised structures, they are spaces designated for the kind of learning laid out above. *Escuelitas* are a space in which experiences and capabilities are encouraged. In *escuelitas, caridades* (spirits' communications) are sometimes assembled piece by piece with different *espiritistas* building off one another. Espirito Santo has argued, with regards to *Espiritismo*, knowledge and personhood are linked (2015a, 2015b:581), and selves do not pre-exist their production. It follows, then, that because knowledge production is spread and dispersed among multiple *espiritistas,* the interconnected relationships

among these practitioners play a great role in the constitution of their spiritual faculties and identities. The setting of *escuelitas* magnifies this interconnection.

Having talked about mothering and family in chapter three —both spiritual, biological and the way the two overlap—I explore community in a broader sense. As discussed previously in the thesis' introduction, relevant ideas of knowledge are rooted in feeling, both as emotion and sensation. Through examining *escuelitas,* this chapter focuses on themes of communal, embodied knowledge production. As such, it highlights cooperative, creative and imaginative action foundational to *Espiritismo Cruzado*. I begin by demonstrating how *espiritistas* cultivate a space like *escuelitas*. Because I came to learn that relevant knowledge can only be understood according to its particularities, I embrace Espirito Santo's (2012) utilisation of 'sentient ecology' (Ingold 2000:25) in her description and analysis of *Espiritismo Cruzado.*

I continue by examining how spiritual development is verified through witnessing and validating. Such notions of verification and validation carry weight, especially in the context of historically, and currently, marginalised Black women. Knowledge, though recognised as being granted through spirits' communication, is shared and distributed amongst participants of an *escuelita*, contributing to an individual *espiritista*'s sense of self, spiritual ability, confidence etc., but also a sense of solidarity and support. That is to say, while spirits are the source of knowledge, the collectivity of *escuelitas* allows for knowledge to be experienced and take form.

I then illustrate the fluidity of roles amongst participants. *Escuelitas* present how knowledge is diffused amongst participants. Even the most experienced, developed *espiritista* needs others to properly engage *muertos*, necessitating that practitioners' positions shift. A continual transference of roles, like receiver or sharer of *caridad*, showcases something very evident ethnographically but undermentioned in literature

regarding *Espiritismo*—not just the importance of others in one's own spiritual development, but the necessity of them. *Escuelitas* show how multiple actors shape the spiritual development and religiosity of *espiritistas.* Attention to these dynamics between practitioners builds upon ideas of *espiritistas,* in addition to spirits, guiding each other in their spiritual paths.

Then I discuss how this spiritual guidance often coincides with practical advice and programs for action that help *espiritistas inventar* and *resolver*. Guidance/advice signals the knowledge produced by *espiritistas* as authoritative knowledge, because it is the foundation upon which decisions are made (Jordan 1993 [1978]; Davis-Floyd and Davis 1996). The dynamics I observed in *escuelitas* offer insight into the forms that knowledge production takes and how this concrete knowledge informs action. Like Espirito Santo writes: 'I always felt that there was more to "knowledge" here than merely *knowing* or its absence. That knowledge *did* something (to people and their environment) rather than *was* just something (something learned, transmitted, obscured *between* people)' (2015b: 580). Knowledge links people together and compels them to take action.

Creating the Space

Here I explore what it is like to participate in *escuelitas*. I demonstrate *escuelitas* as spaces of spiritual development, as mentioned, an ongoing process that is crucial to *espiritista* practice. Participants of *escuelitas* dedicate this time and space to working with *muertos*. Relevant to this practice is an internalising of particular bodily forms, a process of corporeal 'enskillment, in which learning is inseparable from doing, and in which both are embedded in the context of a practical engagement in the world' (Ingold 2000:387). In this section, and throughout the chapter, I will explore how 'skill' comes from orienting oneself to one's sensitivities, and how this orientation is developed by practicing in an

environment like an *escuelita* (cf. Ingold 2007:25). *Escuelitas* showcase the cultivation of the above mentioned sentient ecology, as an awareness of the embodied knowledge production necessary to *Espiritismo Cruzado*.

We began to arrange the room for the *escuelita,* forming a circle with plastic chairs, mapping it to accommodate our liking and size. Olga, a friend of mine and a regular at this Thursday night *escuelita* in the *Dragones* neighbourhood of *Centro Habana*, arrived, '*Mi amor*!' (My love!) She was dark-skinned Black, wore her hair in tight braids, and often dressed in white, regardless of working with *muertos* or not. She seemed excited to see me. She went around affectionately greeting the rest of the women. She was thrilled to see Gema, the host's sister and a very developed *espiritista*. '*Mi hermana*!' (My sister, term of affection) Olga said as they embraced.

The room appeared smaller than it actually was due to the amount of religious and spiritual memorabilia. There was one display that included a bottle of cider that had collected dust. A table with old photos of deceased relatives was set up alongside with a vase of flowers and a single glass of water. One *espiritista* put fresh basil into another vase and placed it on the *bóveda* next to two dolls, a *gitana* and an *Africana*. In addition, there was a plastic statuette of a bare-chested *Indio* wearing an ornate headdress. An *espiritista* shook the maraca in front of the representation of Eleggúa, again, the *oricha* who represents crossroads and inbetweeness. Typically, reverence to him begins work with *muertos*.

It was still early, and only a few of us had arrived. We drank our strong, sugary coffee out of little cups; the sweetness left my throat stinging. The air too was sweet with the scent of tobacco and coffee. As women arrived, they pulled their long religious skirts out of plastic bags and put them on over short-shorts or jeans. Most were gingham patterned, a few were solid white. Some were tiered, others patchwork.

Olga lit the candle, put on her glasses, and began with an oration followed by a *padre nuestro.* We went around in the circle to *despojar,* a kind of *limpieza* (cleansing). *Despojando* in front of the *bóveda* refers to the individualised acts involved in this kind of cleansing. Fingers are often dipped into the glasses of water and hands are held over candles. Perfume or cologne is poured into hands which pass over the body. Some snap fingers, others knock on the table. Some circle a single arm above their heads; it varies.

Olga spoke softly and seriously. Several of us leaned in to hear her better. As Olga led us in another *padre nuestro* she spotted two women chatting and paused, 'Done?' she asked them. It was more shutting them up than an actual question. She was calm in her reaction, but her tone had a severity and seriousness to it as well. Olga did not often contribute during the *escuelitas,* potentially, but not necessarily, indicating that she was less developed than others. Despite this, she had an authority that came from her reciting opening orations. The two women quieted down and nodded. We continued. Olga began the *padre nuestro* from the beginning. A few people arrived late and made spaces for themselves in the circle, shuffling about to find places to sit. Some sat themselves on the steps due to the lack of chairs. One late arrival, a young woman who was in the earlier stages of spiritual development, asked Olga if she should *despojar*. Instead of answering her, Olga stared at her, chin down, eyes wide, eyebrows up, and mouth agape. The young woman took Olga's expression as a yes and we resumed.

Slowly more and more people arrived. Song is a crucial part of *escuelitas* and *Espiritismo Cruzado.* Singing is an activity that signifies *espiritista* practice and practice of *la religión* more broadly. I was told about the songs sung and how they have genealogies rooted in religious and spiritual traditions going back to when the first *Congos* came. Our songs competed with the other noises of the city. There were children playing, dogs barking, the *panadero* (bread seller) hollering, neighbours' violent

coughs and blaring reggaetón that came from nowhere in particular. We sang:

Ayúdanos, ampáranos	Help us, protect us
en el nombre de dios, ay dios.	in the name of god, oh god.
Si la luz redentora te llama,	If the redemptive light calls you,
y te llama con amor a la tierra,	and calls you with love to the earth,
ay dios.	oh god.
Yo quisiera ver a ese ser,	I would like to see that being,
cantando al divino Manuel.	singing to the divine Manuel.
Oye buen ser, avanza y ven,	Hear [us] good being, advance and come,
que el coro te llama y te dice ven.	the choir calls you and tells you to come.

Like the song referring to a chorus of voices calling out, *escuelitas* function through a chorus of voices working together to communicate with *muertos*. The flow of the songs was such that each melted into the next. One after another. A few people got up and effectively switched seats with those who were not previously seated in the circle. The different coloured fabric of flowy skirts fanned and the noise of *collares* and bracelets jingled. One of the *espiritistas*' daughters began to play with my hair. I noticed the body language of other *espiritistas.* Gema was singing and shaking, she refreshed her body with the water from the *palangana* (see figure 6).[55] Her eyes were shut tight and her knees were bopping back and forth. Many bounced their knees. Several held their heads in their hands, resting their chins. Someone went around the circle sprinkling us with water from the *palangana*; I felt the drops land on my head.

[55]Basin filled with a mixture of *aguardiente*, *cascarilla* (a chalk-like substance of eggshells), flower petals, water and perfume. *Cascarilla*, which historically referred to the grounds of the husk or bark of a plant, has over time been replaced by egg shell. I was told eggs symbolise life-giving, again a nod to reproduction and mothering.

Figure 7: Example of a palangana being prepared

I saw *espiritistas* focus on passing their wet hands over their eyes—to give them spiritual sight. I also noticed that people passed their wet hands over areas where they hurt or had chronic aches and pains—shoulder, legs, etc. In my spiritual development, I took cues from what more experienced *espiritistas* did and the ways they engaged with the environment around them, learning how to develop from them as much as from *muertos' caridades*. I was handed a *jícara* (hollowed half coconut shell) filled with *aguardiente*. Mouth burning, I began to *soplar*. I spat it in thirds forcefully to my left, right, then in front of me.

Soplar was something I had mastered but originally, on my first few attempts, liquid clumsily dribbled down my chin. I was embarrassed. After giggling, my spiritual family reassured me, and I continued to attempt *soplando* weekly, while watching other *espiritistas*. This helped me grasp this at one time alien and awkward action so that by this point, at an *escuelita* such as this one, I could do it not only easily but expertly.

Soplando is an example of a kind of knowing that can only be engaged through the sentient ecology presented above. I learned through watching, and then practically applying what I had observed. As we went around the circle, I saw a little girl dip her pinkie in the *jícara*, put it in her mouth, and then shake her hand to the left, the right, then in front of her. These dialogical means of showing and learning demonstrate how *espiritistas*' development can take form through *escuelitas*.

Csordas' somatic modes of attention come to mind here, as he describes the way attention is paid not just to one's own body but the bodies and actions of others who are enmeshed within the same 'intersubjective milieu' (1993:139). This requires an understanding of the spiritual development that takes place during *escuelitas* as a process that entails 'affective attunement' (Hollan and Throop 2011: 14; Halpern 2001). Questions of bodily actions will be elaborated on further in the following chapter. Yet still, drawing attention to somatic modes of attention is helpful because these actions, like passing water from the *palangana* over a sore knee or shutting one's eyes tightly until a spiritual current is felt, can all be classified as what Csordas refers to as 'culturally elaborated ways of attending to and with one's body' (1993:138). Like the thesis' use of the erotic as an analytic tool to engage knowledge production that necessarily involves the spiritual, sensual, emotional and physical, somatic modes of attention also reveal connections between the spiritual and the corporeal. Further, through lenses like the erotic or somatic modes of attention, a dialectic between the *espiritista's* experience and the collective's practice emerges (ibid).

The idea of attending 'with' one's body is seen in tobacco use. Several women were working with tobacco and the space had quickly filled with smoke, thick almost to the point where your vision was obstructed. Tobacco produces a shared sensory environment creating bodily and affective unity to synchronise us and contribute to the inherent intersubjectivity at play. I was passed a hand rolled cigar. The tobacco

was bad, people complained, and I was advised to roll it between my fingers to soften the cigar before I bit off the tip. We passed around half cut soda cans to use as ash trays.

As mentioned, *Espiritismo Cruzado* practice is tailored to each *espiritista*'s capacities but also her likes and dislikes. Because of this, no one is obligated to smoke. Many practitioners do not use tobacco in their work with *muertos*, however I observed smoking as a pertinent and ubiquitous part of practice, one that helps allow for communication with *muertos* to take shape (cf. Bender 2011:275). Substances like tobacco both fashion and promote the appropriate and necessary atmosphere for communication with spirits. Enactments such as smoking tobacco and singing specific songs create a familiar and/ or pleasant environment that calls, and further incentivises, spirits to communicate (see chapter five). These enactments may be reasonably characterised as 'affective practices' following Wetherell (2012). For Wetherell, affect is about embodied meaning-making. These practices contribute to *escuelitas*' 'affective textures,' (ibid 4) shaped through the everyday actions, like smoking, that design *escuelitas* as a site that is at once predisposed to work with *muertos,* and as a site that practitioners actively cultivate in order to this do work.

In these examples, rather than affect being designated as either solely emotion or solely influence, affect combines a particular emotional and ontological dynamic (ibid 2-3). Because actions in *escuelitas* happen together as a group (singing, smoking, etc.), affective practice unfolds as inherently intersubjective. For *Espiritismo Cruzado*, affect as force or making a difference is in dialogue with affect as feeling or emotion (ibid 2-16). *Escuelitas* thread these understandings of affect together through the way all participants, *espiritistas* and *muertos* alike, work together.

Espiritista abilities are sharpened in ways that were obvious to my interlocutors. Developing abilities and learning how to be affected are

essential to practice. Knowledge could be absorbed or incorporated, but it was not something that could be tested. *Espiritistas* do not acquire a knowledge that pre-exists relationships to their communities or their *muertos*. On the contrary, it is only through their relationships that they could be privy to such knowledge. While the idea of being an empty vessel waiting to be filled is not completely untrue given the way spirits communicate, it does not imply an object of knowledge that is already formed.

Having discussed how *espiritistas* form *escuelitas* and the dynamics, actions, and relationships that allow for them to flourish, below I focus on witnessing. I suggest that *escuelitas* can be characterised as spaces of erotic knowledge production. Knowledge in this context crafts and then fosters community in part because it is produced collectively. While an examination of the complex dynamics of self are germane and fruitful, I stress that community is just as relevant, and in fact necessary, to understanding *Espiritismo Cruzado.* Following this, I outline how *escuelitas* play host to important processes of validating, contributing to both a strength in self-capacity as an *espiritista*, and in cementing wider group dynamics of community. Given this, *escuelitas* nurture trust and confidence through these processes of verifying.

Witnessing

Here I expand further on *escuelitas* as a form of collaborative knowledge production, by exemplifying that *espiritistas'* spiritual development takes place not just between the *espiritista* and her *muertos,* but in relation to a wider group. I focus on the collectivity of *escuelitas* and draw attention to the weight of witnessing and its significant role for *espiritistas*. My ethnography suggests that witnessing and participating in an intersubjective social exchange validates one's spirituality as an *espiritista*. Much like the women of Maniat who 'construct' death via their

communal weeping and grieving for the departed (Seremetakis 1991), developing as an *espiritista* can really only work as a group.

Later that evening, another *espiritista*, Tania, began to fall into trance. I did not know Tania very well but from our weekly meetings it seemed she was less developed than others, though she still often shared *caridades*. Her hands, which were folded in her lap, rose and her arms formed right angles. Tania's convulsions were soft at first but became more drastic and violent. Her belly contracted visibly. We sang with more and more animation, tapping our feet, clapping, people grabbed spoons and tapped them against the wall. Her *muerto* arrived and grabbed me to keep balance. He said, 'Good night,' and laughed. We wished him a good night in return. He went around greeting us all. His speaking changed; he began to only use noises. 'Uh,' 'ah,' 'e,' 'ooh.' Gema, again, a very strong, developed *espiritista,* translated for the *muerto*. She was an intense person and spoke her mind regardless of the consequences, perhaps more pointedly than any of my other close interlocutors.

Gema deduced that the *muerto*'s tongue was cut out in life by his master. His greeting and the glimpse into his experiences during life intimated that he was a *Congo*. He used Tania's skirt to *despojar* (cleanse) a young woman in the circle. The *muerto* tapped on my glasses. We assumed he was trying to tell someone they needed glasses. He was displeased with our interpretation and shook his head vigorously. Together we realised the *muerto* was trying to draw attention to the colour of the frames, red, not the glasses themselves. Having successfully conveyed that message, the *Congo* moved on. He began to spin people in circles in order for them to evolve spiritually, each revolution around a circle representing a step forward.

He went on to advise other *espiritistas* in the circle referring to their dress and femininity, 'make yourself pretty;' jobs, 'there is something shady going on where you work, be careful what you sign, and if you can, get

out;' and necessary acts that needed to be undertaken for *santos*, 'offer a letter in a bottle to Yemayá and put it in the sea and if she fulfils your wishes, hold a *tambor* [drumming activity in *Ocha*] for her.' After some time, however, he became frustrated and distraught that he himself could not speak. Gema told him not to lose hope. He continued on communicating with Tania's body and Gema's words. The *muerto* looked to a woman in the circle who I observed had been dismissive and rude to Tania in previous *escuelitas*. He communicated that he knew she did not believe (in) Tania, and so she did not believe in him. 'But now I am here,' he said, 'and you cannot deny me.'

The woman began to talk back to the *muerto* but Gema scolded her for doing this. The *muerto* disregarded her and went on to another woman. The *muerto's* reproach draws attention to an important dynamic and potential tension. As *espiritistas* come into existence as practitioners of *Espiritismo Cruzado* through their *muertos* (Espirito Santo 2015a:268), doubting an *espiritista*'s ability reflects the absence, or doubt, of an authentic, legitimate relationship to spirits. In *Espiritismo Cruzado* practice there are not clear lines between *muerto/espiritista,* or knower/known (cf. Bordo 1986:450). As such, demanding respect for the *muerto* means demanding respect for Tania. The *muerto* in this scenario calls for the *espiritista* above to recognise and stand witness to Tania's spiritual capacity, allowing for verification and validation of Tania as an *espiritista*. Witnessing and verifying amongst *espiritistas*, as a community, is part of what makes *escuelitas* such an important space. These processes cement an *espiritista*'s trust in herself, as confidence in one's abilities and confidence in *muertos* are interwoven.

For an interaction like the one above, multiple actors are necessary: Gema, Tania, and the *Congo*. Without Gema to translate for a *muerto* who could not speak, the *muerto*'s communication via Tania's material body would not have been useful. Indeed, without another person, trance is decidedly useless because the *espiritista* herself does not know what a

muerto shares while she is in trance. The dynamic that Tania and Gema illustrate is one of co-authorship as much as the dynamic between Tania and her *muerto*. Spiritual apprehension and development occur embedded within a community. As seen through Tania, Gema, and the *muerto*, *escuelitas* involve an intimate quilting of participants.

The dynamic between these actors emphasises the intersubjective nature of an *espiritista* and her *muertos* but also *espiritistas* as a group, again highlighting how *escuelitas* demonstrate knowledge as collectively produced. The *muerto* went on, telling another woman she should not cry anymore. He said he knew that she did not believe in herself, that she thought she did not matter, that she was not worth anything. If she kept it up, she would die, the cause of death would likely be a heart attack. The spirit advised her to believe in herself, and her *muertos*, but also advised her to go see the doctor about her heart. *Muertos* mandate that women— and in the case of these women, historically marginalised Black Cuban women—value themselves.

I suggest the concept of the erotic, a kind of spiritual power that is rooted in deep feeling, is relevant to *Espiritismo Cruzado* practice. As detailed in the previous chapter, most of my interlocutors insisted that the capacity to practice *Espiritismo Cruzado* is an innate gift, yet at the same time there is the understanding that this gift needs to be cultivated through a lifelong process of spiritual development. Much like a gift or *don* that needs to be developed, Lorde refers to the erotic as a capacity within us, but one that needs to be accepted (2007[1984]:53). An acceptance of the erotic corresponds to the spiritual development that occurs in *escuelitas.* The erotic reflects the embodied, creative, communal, knowledge production that pertains to *Espiritismo Cruzado*. Lorde writes, being 'in touch with the erotic, I become less willing to accept powerlessness supplied by other states of being which are not native to me, such resignation, despair, self-effacement, depression, self-denial' (ibid 58). The idea of these states not being native reflects back on the idea of

innate capacity, but also the necessity to accept the *don* and develop it. For Lorde, recognising the power of the erotic in ourselves and others helps to illuminate the world around us and helps us be truly responsible to ourselves (ibid). As a parallel, *escuelitas* provide an erotic space of knowledge production wherein practitioners validate the spiritual capacities of others and have their community verify their own.

Lorde's erotic begins with the understanding of an intrinsic value in Black womanhood, paralleling *Espiritismo Cruzado's* understanding of inherent value, though importantly, via relationships with spirits. Like the erotic, in the context of *Espiritismo Cruzado* this inherent value is recognised through sharing deeply (ibid 56). Furthermore, in addition to pointing at concerns of self-worth, the *muerto*'s message includes seeing a doctor, demonstrating the blending of spiritual guidance and practical advice, which I will touch upon later in the chapter.

Tania, by now out of trance, turned to another *espiritista*, 'I feel… your *Conga*…', she stumbled not knowing how to communicate the message. Gema told her to keep talking, 'Express yourself how you can.' Tania looked to her, nodded, and continued on. Similar to the example above, Tania's abilities were dependent on Gema's support. Without it, the *caridad* she shared may have remained contained within the private communication between her and her *muertos*.

Spiritual development is a process of communal knowledge production. Development is contingent on the interpersonal encounters that are special to *escuelitas* (cf. Hollan and Throop 2008:387) as the intersubjective process of spiritual development, of course involves spirits, but also involves a community of *espiritistas*. *Escuelita*'s importance is perhaps most clearly exemplified in Alexander's assertion that 'no one comes into consciousness alone, in isolation only for herself, or passively' (2005: 285).

Espiritismo Cruzado is based in feeling. Practitioners use the word *sentir* (to feel) often when working with *muertos*. People ask, '*¿Qué sientes*?' (What do you feel), because, as the thesis' introduction laid out, feeling something is knowing it. Yet, while feeling is tantamount to knowing, feelings are inchoate and part of an *espiritista*'s developing is understanding how to properly communicate them. Spiritual development in *escuelitas* allows for this communication and expression of feeling to be learned. Development, then, can bridge the gap between a *muerto*'s communication and the work of legibly sharing it.

The interaction above, wherein Gema encourages Tania to 'express [her]self however she can,' is important because it demonstrates an 'education of attention' (Gibson 1979:254 as quoted in Ingold 2000:416). *Escuelitas* highlight an education of attention because they are contexts within which *espiritistas* learn to endow their emotions and sensory perceptions with spiritual meaning. An education of attention stresses that learning happens through attending to things in situ, as that is the only way to draw out subtleties and textures (ibid).

In *escuelitas, espiritistas'* capacities are affirmed and validated. In doing so, bonds are created that engender a spiritual community. If Tania's abilities are contingent on this kind of verification, it reasons that the lifelong process of becoming an *espiritista* is contingent on these social relationships. In *escuelitas*, we see work with *muertos* can only emerge in the course of the dynamic efforts of a community.

Escuelitas are crucial to spiritual development. They act as spaces that provoke a kind of self-formation. At the same time, *escuelitas* shed light on how this development happens via community. *Escuelitas* offer a way for *espiritistas* to verify and nurture their spiritual capacities through a kind of productive witnessing that foments growth as practitioners but also support as a community. I discuss how roles shift in *escuelitas*, further contributing to *Espiritismo Cruzado* as a practice of erotic

knowledge production. This shifting is possible because spiritual development is an ongoing, life-long process, meaning *escuelitas* bring together *espiritistas* at all levels of development, from novice to highly experienced.

Shifting Roles

Escuelitas expose the lack of distinct, determinant boundaries in *Espiritismo Cruzado* practice. A porosity of boundaries is evident in many components of *escuelitas*; one manifestation is in the fluidity of authority. I show how dependence and authority circulate among the group. An *espiritista* can find herself either the recipient or the giver of a *muerto*'s message. Perhaps part of the reason people respect the shifting power dynamics is because it is purely attributed to the will of the spirits. However, as I have pointed to elsewhere, the line that distinguishes the *espiritista* and her spirits is blurry.

Another night, mid-practice at the same *escuelita,* the lights went out. As power cuts are a common occurrence in post-Soviet Cuba (see also Pertierra 2008:756) people merely made light-hearted protests, 'Hey!' or 'The lights are out!' but we mostly continued as normal. The lighting was very different now, more in line with how Hollywood movies portray communication with spirits. It was a soft reddish light; the room was lit by the *bóveda's* single candle and drags from people's cigarettes and tobacco. On this night, the room was divided with a curtain due to *Santo* activities being undertaken on the other side. The cloth indicated the boundary that existed between the two practices—*Espiritismo Cruzado* and *Santo*—especially as *espiritistas/santeras* would cross between them over and over again throughout the evening. While the practices are separate, their boundedness is somewhat illusory, as demonstrated by the *religiosas* that traversed both the boundaries between traditions and the actual curtain with ease.

One *espiritista* stood, walking back and forth in the remaining space. She paced about two feet, but she commanded the space, small though it may have been. She sang with a gravelly, raspy voice. While typically we would sing together as a group, because her voice was so haunting and compelling, the rest of us remained quiet.

Yo traigo arena,	I bring sand,
yo traigo arena,	I bring sand,
yo traigo arena	I bring sand,
del fondo de la mar.	from the bottom of the sea.
Ay, mis chamolongos,[56] *yo los saco,*	Oh, my *chamolongos*, I get them,
yo los saco, del fondo de la mar.	I get them from the bottom of the sea.
Y con permiso, mi Madre Agua,	And with permission, my *Madre Agua,*[57]
yo traigo arena	I bring sand
del fondo de la mar.	from the bottom of the sea.

Another *espiritista*, an albino woman,[58] who others boasted had tremendous *vista*, said, 'Gema it is about you—I am picking up that you have problems. I do not know, problems with your uterus, your ovaries, I do not know.'

Gema granted light to the spirits, '*Luz* for who administers to you. I just have one ovary,' she confirmed. This happened often as messages can be regarding past, present, or future. The often times sensitive nature of spirits' messages magnifies a further layer of intimacy between *espiritistas* beyond just time spent together. Content of messages is frequently about personal topics. Communications such as these reflect a kind mutual vulnerability, care and protection.

She continued, 'Gema, my sister, you need to make changes in your life. Do you have a yellow *saya* (skirt)?' Gema responded affirmatively. 'Put on

[56] The discs used for divination in *Palo*, often made of shells or coconut skins.
[57] Again, Madre Agua is a *Palo mpungo* syncretised with Yemayá and La Virgen de Regla. Singing to *mpungos* or *orichas* is common in *Espiritismo Cruzado* practice, and again highlights a fluidity of boundaries.
[58] I learned albino was understood, at least commonly, as a racial category in itself, again pointing to the complicated system of racial taxonomies based on colour coding.

your yellow *saya* and work with a *Conga* that is in your *cordón espiritual,*[59]' she told her. Gema, who so often took command of *escuelitas*, was now on the receiving end of the *muertos'* messages. One specific *espiritista* is never consistently dependent on another as the recipients of *muertos*' messages rotate.

Authority is not located within one particular actor but is transferred among them (Tronto 1989:179-180). The authority that *muertos* offer is dynamic and shared, it is always changing hands and the change is readily accepted, even welcome. *Caridades* are sometimes assembled piece by piece with different *espiritistas* building off one another. While dynamics between *espiritistas* may at times be asymmetrical, it is temporary. Compared to many other contexts of *la religión*, *espiritistas* are relatively non-hierarchical. Access to authority comes not from the number of *ahijados* (godchildren), memorisation of myths or ritual languages, but from the depth of relationships that contribute to developing one's *don* and the at once cultivated and spontaneous communications of spirits.

Authority links back to the erotic. Lorde characterises the erotic as a kind of power (2007 [1984]:53) but also discusses how power is rooted in the erotic, and how the erotic creatively produces power. In the case of *Espiritismo Cruzado*, like the erotic as outlined by Lorde, there is a power in an *espiritista*'s ability to affect the world. This power is rooted in potent capabilities that creatively produce a diffuse authority. The erotic's complicated relationship to power is exemplified in *escuelitas* as roles shift; power-as-authority ebbs and flows. The *espiritista* who addresses Gema does so with an ability to affect Gema's life through her *caridad*. This *espiritista* is able to have such an impact due to her spiritual capacity. This dynamic signals to a shift from Gema offering advice, to receiving it, illustrating the creative, productive diffusion of power and

[59] *Cordón espiritual* is another term for *cuadro espiritual*.

authority. Lorde discusses how in order to be utilised, the erotic must be shared and recognised. The validating and recognising relevant to *Espiritismo Cruzado* practice parallels this as roles shift and deep feeling is shared. *Escuelitas*, and the witnessing that occurs in them, show the intertwined nature of knowing oneself, knowing one's *muertos*, and knowing one's community.

Lorde's framework of the erotic as a resource (ibid) is helpful as well. The erotic is a resource because it can help inform and illuminate actions in the world. I examine how knowledge production works toward problem solving; working with *muertos* allows for several possibilities that help practitioners *inventar* (make ends meet). *Escuelitas* as problem solving spaces create support for *la lucha* (the constant hustle/struggle) of everyday challenges. *Muertos*' messages are almost always framed in programs for action, highlighting their *caridades* as knowledge production embedded in practice.

Programs for Action

This section pays attention to the importance of advice and guidance in the environments of *escuelitas*. I build off the previous chapter's description of guidance in spiritual development, where I demonstrated that this guidance often originates from one's family in the form of women kin. Relatedly, I argued that this guidance offered by 'older,' and/or more developed *espiritistas* to ones who are less developed can both parallel and overlap with rearing children. Here, I continue with an examination of spiritual guidance and focus on how practical advice and spiritual guidance fold onto one another in an *espiritista's* growth. I draw out how this advice/guidance manifests in programs for action, not inert information, that help *espiritistas resolver*.

I have shown how *escuelitas* are crucial to spiritual development. *Escuelitas* highlight the meanings *espiritistas* attach to the knowledge produced with spirits, but also that these meanings and knowledge are

co-produced amongst other *espiritistas*. I have shared my observations that development can only occur in relation to other *espiritistas* who contribute to your spiritual path. Now I examine how *escuelitas* give participants not only an opportunity to learn and experience in an environment that encourages capabilities, but also how *escuelitas* allow for *espiritistas* to become aware of potential risks or dangers, as very often the messages spirits share concern practical advice that eases the everyday hardships that women-as-mothers encounter in l*a lucha* (the hustle) of navigating politico-economic realities of post-Soviet Cuba. *Muertos* can be integral in the practices of creative improvisation or *inventar*.

A few weeks later, at an *escuelita* with the same practitioners, we sat waiting for someone to pick up communication from a spirit. The heat had caused the use of coloured hand fans and they, along with all the other colours—acrylic nails, hair scrunchies and jaw clips, the candy pink and mint green walls—made for a bright room. Alexis, a gifted *espiritista*, and Gema's nephew, was one of two men who attended this *escuelita*. He was dark skinned Black and heavy. He had short dreadlocks that did not go past his ears. His voice was deep and rich, but he was also soft spoken. Alexis looked to another *espiritista* and told her she had a spirit with a tendency with *Siete Rayos*.[60] '*Luz*,' she said, 'He is asking for things in my dreams, but they are things I cannot do in my house.'

The *espiritista's muertos* were showing her what needed to be done but they had not communicated the logistics of how to do it. Alexis nodded kindly. He said to her, 'Go to the bush, to the wild.' He asked her if she had a dog or a cat. She replied she had a black cat. He told her that dogs and cats were sacred animals and, if she could, to bring her cat along.

[60] Siete Rayos is the *mpungo* syncretised with Changó. Changó is a hypermasculine *oricha* associated with virility, lightning, and thunder. He is also associated with justice and considered a particularly royal deity (he was the historical king of the Oyo peoples).

There in the bush she should *bañarse* (bathe spiritually). Alexis went on 'and there alongside your sacred animal you can do the works and labours this spirit is asking of you.' Alexis' spiritual guidance cements the notion that developing alongside others in a space like an *escuelita* is so important, as you alone may simply not be privy to all that is necessary for your own personal spiritual evolution.

Not long after, an *espiritista* shifted attention to Olga. She suggested to Olga that she offer Eleggúa a *calabaza* (pumpkin). The woman claimed putting a pumpkin in front of Eleggúa's representation would help Olga to evolve spiritually. Olga needed to do more than that, because Yemayá—her *santo*—was telling her spirits, 'Hang on a second.' The *espiritista* advised Olga that if she was not in the position financially to attend to her spirits and *orichas* in all these ways, she should try to make more money by selling something. Without a government issued permit—which in recent years have become increasingly, extremely difficult to obtain—it was risky. Still, this *espiritista* offered Olga the example of selling popcorn at busy corners where there were few vendors. Risks like these were taken by Cubans daily and arguably more so by women-as-mothers who are the primary providers in their households (Härkönen 2015:112). Via the *muertos* advice and urging relayed through a community of *espiritistas,* Olga would have a better chance to hustle in the day-to-day *lucha*. Money made selling foodstuff would be a welcome supplement to her current state income as a secretary. I remembered once, when speaking with Olga herself, she told me, '*muertos* ensure that you can *resolver* breakfast, lunch and dinner, and, if you are lucky, even a snack.'

Olga seemed to be soaking in all the advice as she fanned herself with a newspaper. There were several voices advising her at once. She said, 'I feel like I am stuck,' she looked to the *espiritista*, 'if you could help me with selling popcorn, I will do it. Because I have been *luchando*, working hard, but things are difficult.' The woman told her she would help Olga

do what was necessary to *resolver*. Olga replied, '*Lu*z' with heavy nods. Olga dipped her hand in the water of the *palangana*, passing it over her body, behind her neck, her legs, her face. These social interactions fuse spiritual guidance and practical advice, illustrating how the two merge to make up *escuelita*s as spaces of supportive, cooperative practice that provide practitioners with the ability to address the concrete conditions of their lives through pragmatic help.

Gema addressed the other man in the circle. He came with Tania and it was the first (and last) time I saw him there. He was a young *Mulato* wearing thick black glasses. He had to push them up every now and again because, despite it being winter, his sweat caused them to slide down his face. He was wearing a matching tank top and shorts with the print of the American flag. Gema told him that she saw he has the spirit of an *Indio*:

> This *Indio* is strong. He is *colorado* [reddish skin tone], bare chested and muscular. He is proud and he will help you. He will help show you how to *seguir luchando* [keep going]. I see a glass with a sunflower and tobacco with a string of smoke emerging from it. The tobacco is resting in an ashtray. If you do not already have this at your *bóveda espiritual*, put it there, just like how I said. Because this *Indio* works through this smoke. I see this as something the spirit is asking you to do sooner rather than later, like before the end of the year.

The young man did not say anything, he just nodded. Gema continued 'Your people, who you trust, are not trustworthy. Where is your family, your elders?' she asked.

He responded, 'They are not in the country.'

Gema went on saying, 'Your light, your force, your I do not know, *ache,* is like turned off.[61] You yourself can solve your problems. Work with your

[61] '*Aché*' refers to the Yoruban-Lucumí term referring to spiritual energy.

muertos and *cocos* and together you can resolve your situation. [62] Ask the spirits that guide you.' She continued, 'Also I see questions surrounding your partner, clear these up. And the thing with the sunflower, that will bring you prosperity. But you, you stay quiet. I see you—you are leaving, you are leaving this country one day, and properly, in an airplane, not on a raft. That is clear. That is as clear as water.'

Gema's advice refers to spiritual and religious work: use your *cocos*, offer tobacco and a sunflower to you *Indio*. These works which are clearly communicated from Gema to that evening's guest are simple actions to be undertaken. Undertaking these actions contributes to a spiritual strengthening, but also an improvement in lived experience. Everyday life, concerns about one's partner, the loyalty of one's friends, and the necessity-cum-desire to leave Cuba for the promises of what might be held abroad, are not only in direct dialogue with *Espiritismo Cruzado*, they are inseparable from it. This fusion is exemplified in the way spiritual guidance and practical advice come together in the programs for action that spirits either suggest or mandate.

Conclusion

Escuelitas show that the entangled relationships among these *espiritistas* play a great role in the constitution of their spiritual faculties and identities. I have argued that *escuelitas* employ a kind of knowledge based on solidarity and community (Narayan 1989: 262). Based on a unity of feeling and action among *espiritistas* with the common goal and interest of working with *muertos, Espiritismo Cruzado* via *escuelitas* also showcase practice as a kind of embodied knowledge, whose production must be understood as intersubjective. *Escuelitas*, for their part as a designated space, also gesture towards collectivity and cooperation as crucial for *Espiritismo Cruzado*. For my interlocutors, focus was placed on

[62] *Cocos* refers to coconut skins which are used in some modes *Ocha* and *Palo* divination.

the way development took shape in small, intimate groups. That is not to say that all communication with *muertos* occurs while one is in the presence of other *espiritistas*—pre-feeling, dreams, etc. show that to be untrue. Yet, *escuelitas*—sitting and working with *muertos* together—are imperative to spiritual development in *Espiritismo Cruzado* practice.

Productive and creative capacity comes from collaboratively working as a group. In addition to sanctioning a space dedicated to spiritual development and communication with *muertos*, *escuelitas* can offer an opportunity to tease out communications that have already been received. *Escuelitas* illustrate the way *espiritistas*' spiritual capacities and identities are developed collectively. Spiritual family and community as a wider whole are essential to *Espiritismo Cruzado*.
In *Espiritismo Cruzado* practice, knowledge is co-produced. The possibility for such co-production is made possible through the joint work that *espiritistas* engage in *escuelitas*. For practitioners, this work is at once emotional, physical, and intellectual, harkening back to the concept of the erotic.

Escuelitas are spaces that *espiritistas* cultivate to work with *muertos*, designating them as sites pregnant with a sentient ecology. At the same time, *espiritistas* are equally cultivated as practitioners by developing in *escuelitas* through bodily ways of learning, knowing, showing and understanding. Jafari Allen considers the following, 'In black theorization, art, and praxis, the unique positionality of black women to self-define and self-valuate their own lived experiences (Collins 1990; Davis 1981; Guy-Sheftall 1995) is a preliminary step in *radical becoming* (hooks 1994)' (2011: 98).

Escuelitas offer a space of such definition and valuation that contributes toward the ongoing process of spiritual development and as such, becoming an *espiritista*. *Escuelitas* highlight the means of witnessing, validating and verifying that are present in *Espiritismo Cruzado*

knowledge production. I have discussed what these processes mean for practitioners' relationship to their own spiritual capacity and how this contributes to the dynamics of community in spiritual families. I have also demonstrated examples of how, through the shifting roles of recipient and deliverer of *muertos*' messages**,** knowledge production is spread and dispersed among multiple *espiritistas,* something magnified by the setting of an *escuelita*. I have argued that, in the space of *escuelitas*, practitioners-via-*muertos* offer each other programs for action that blend both practical advice and spiritual guidance. Like Pertierra writes, through *escuelitas* I observed 'Cuban women actively invoke their gendered capacities and responsibilities not only to voice their dissatisfaction with the scarcity and shortages of post-Soviet life, but also to produce a sense of self-worth' (2008: 763). In the upcoming chapter I continue with the theme of erotic knowledge production, especially in relation to the body, by focusing on experiences of drumming activities called *cajones*.

Chapter Five: *Cajón*

Introduction

This chapter centres around the *cajón,* a celebratory drumming event held for *muertos.* My exploration of *cajones* builds from chapter four in drawing attention to the importance and prevalence of creative processes of collaboration in *Espiritismo Cruzado* practice. At the same time, the activity of the *cajón* provides an opportunity to shed light on some of *muertos*' desires and motivations. Through the *cajón*, I further explore bodies, substances, and materials as media for *muertos* and their communications. To examine the *cajón*, I continue with the erotic as an analytic (Lorde [2007] 1984:56). The erotic is useful for this engagement of knowledge and the spiritual because it brings together the sensorial, physical, emotional, and psychic. I further demonstrate the simultaneity of these experiences in *Espiritismo Cruzado* practice.

The thesis examines the importance of trance and embodiment primarily in terms of what it means as a gendered form of knowledge production and how such knowledge production subsequently impacts practitioners. Thus far I have also looked at how *muertos* speak on a wide range of issues and help *espiritistas resolver*. However, this chapter differs slightly in that it provides a discussion of what *Espiritismo Cruzado* practice— trance in particular— means for *muertos*, framing *espiritistas*' actions as undertaken for the benefit of spirits. I explore how the holding of a *cajón* is motivated by *muertos'* themselves because the activity provides spirits the opportunity to be in a body.

The *cajón*, as a group activity, shares commonalities with *escuelitas* detailed in the previous chapter, though there are several important divergences. Both are dedicated to communication with spirits and both foster communities. Yet while *escuelitas* are spaces for learning to nurture one's spiritual capacities and a part of everyday, mundane routines, a *cajón* is special. It is ordinarily held to commemorate, thank or

fulfil a request made by *muertos*. A *cajón* is usually held at the behest of a spirit, though there are times when another *espiritista* might recommend one. Because it was described to me as a kind of party for *muertos*, *cajones* are relevant to both *Palo and Espiritismo Cruzado* (see chapter seven).

A *cajón* for *muertos* differs from *tambores*, drumming ceremonies in *Santo*, which are held for *orichas* and require sacred *báta* drums that can only be played by men who have undergone a particular *Santo* ritual. While *tamboleros*, drummers of *batá* drums, need a particular ritual initiation to drum, *cajoneros'* ability to drum is based on aptitude (skilfully keeping rhythm, playing well etc.). This distinction between playing for *orichas* and playing for *muertos* returns to the recurring dynamic of *don* (innate capacity) versus initiation. That is, a gifted musician (*don*) versus someone who is ritually sanctioned to play (initiation).

While there are specific songs and a particular order for *tambores*, drumming for a *cajón* has a basic rhythm but apart from that it is generally improvised. And, unlike the sacred *batá* drums for *Santo, Espiritismo Cruzado* and *Palo* drumming are done on more practical, historically-around-the-house objects. The *cajón* as a happening gets its name from the instruments used. '*Cajón'* literally means drawer and refers to the wooden blocks used for drumming. All of these distinctions between a *tambor* and a *cajón* reflect back on *Espiritismo Cruzado*'s tendency to relative openness and non-hierarchy. Different to *escuelitas* which utilise a variety of methodologies to communicate with spirits, a *cajón* typically only involves direct communication via trance. Again, this specific methodology of spiritual communication relates to the *cajón* as a space designated for *muertos* to experience embodiment.

Figure 8: Cajonero (drummer) sitting atop his instrument at a cajón

As I have laid out thus far in the thesis, communicating with spirits is a somatic and emotional method of knowledge production. As in *escuelitas*, a *cajón* demonstrates that knowledge is produced via community and cooperative action. Ideas of belonging through a spiritual family are important and highlighted in activities like an *escuelita* as detailed in the previous chapter and in chapter three. For a *cajón*, however, the scale is typically multiplied. Attendees go beyond spiritual family. On more than one occasion I accompanied friends and interlocutors to *cajones* where I did not know the *espiritista* hosting them. Family spans to a larger community, again shaping how *espiritistas* relate to one another, though in this case through somewhat wider networks in addition to the close-knit intimate relationships laid out in the thesis thus far. Participants actively cultivate a *cajón* as a space with the particular conditions necessary for *espiritistas* to fall into trance.

I observed *cajones* as demonstrating an important dynamic. As mentioned above, they are held because spirits *want* them. Just as trance

is a desired state for *espiritistas*, so is it a desired state for *muertos*. *Muertos* want to experience sensuous pleasures, as such they ask for a *cajón* to be held, and *espiritistas*—when they have the proper conditions in order (an appropriate space, the money necessary to hold a *cajón*, and the singer and drummers organised)—comply.

I present experiences I shared with one practitioner, Lydia (as introduced in the thesis' introductory vignette), across two different *cajones*. My experiences with Lydia help me explore what goes into falling into trance, a desired state achieved through openness. Open bodies, which elsewhere I note are by their very 'nature' vulnerable to penetration are, in fact, crucial resources. Rather than an open, vulnerable body meaning inferiority, it indexes an ability to provide opportunities for *muertos* through trance. I detail how trance itself is the cumulative result of affective sensibilities fostered during the *cajón*. Below I discuss how this state of openness or sensitivity is nurtured through the use of substances, dancing, and drumming.

Tools and Media

Relevant to a *cajón* is an erotic, that is, both sensory and affective, engagement. In part, this engagement is achieved through the important utilisation of particular substances such as tobacco, rum, *aguardiente*, perfume or molasses. All of these substances and materials incline practitioners to necessary sensibilities and reflect *muertos*' own preferences. I build from previous chapters in addressing the way substances as media contribute to a particular environment that is necessary for communicating with spirits. I show how substances are tools that help practitioners know/feel *muertos*. In this way, I frame substances and materials as media or technologies that both aid communication with spirits and act as communicators in their own right.

Lydia is vibrant woman in her late 50s whom I met through Odalis. Odalis' cousin, Isabel, is Lydia's *madrina* (godmother) in *Santo*. Lydia always had a playfulness to her even when she spoke to me about things that were serious. She is very energetic with a wide grin that accompanied all her life advice; neither her grins nor her advice were in short supply. She is both warm and loving but also sharp-tongued. She is dark-skinned Black and wears her hair very short, nearly always sporting a colourful handkerchief on her head.

Lydia invited me to accompany her to a *cajón* a friend of hers was holding. She told me the host/her friend was a doctor the party had sent to Bissau and that he had the opportunity to return home to Cuba briefly. As such, he wanted to take advantage of his time home in Habana to dedicate a *cajón* to his *gitana.* The host was of average height. He had thick hair and wore glasses. He was *Mulato claro* (light-skinned *Mulato*), almost to the point of *jabao.*[63]

When we arrived, I saw that there were several people seated and only a few up and dancing. Nevertheless, the living room area was packed. It felt as though there were nearly thirty people or more crammed into the flat the host shared with his brother. We cleansed ourselves at the *bóveda*. I went up and dipped my right hand into the *palangana*. Then I dipped my finger in only the largest centre glass as the other glasses on the *bóveda* would pertain to the hosts' particular spirits. The centre glass on the *bóveda* is a general cup for all spirits and the most powerful. I rubbed my hands together and passed them over my whole body.

After, I placed my hands over the candle's flame and covered my eyes to contribute to *vista* (sight). The (glasses of) water and the candle's flame are spiritual embodiments that allow for spirits to be felt and known.

[63] Racial category that refers to those who are light skinned with phenotypic features that are coded Black such as hair, nose, lips.

Engelke writes of materialities such as these. They are the way in which spirits can be recognised as present, but they also act as representations of spirits (2011: 213). Touching the water and feeling the heat are important. Knowledge is embodied and apprehended through senses—hearing, sight, smell, touch, taste.

Other bodily forms of communication were described to me during different points of my fieldwork as well. Fever, tachycardia, and chills were common; I even heard of choking sensations a few times. For practitioners of *Espiritismo Cruzado*, the body is a means by which spirits communicate. One *espiritista* told me that when she first began to pass a specific *muerto* she physically felt the symptoms of his death. He was hanged; she felt as if she was being strangled and her neck ached severely. Her example is not unique. Another interlocutor too had mentioned experiencing symptoms of the illness that one of her spirits had died of.

On one occasion, I attended a *cajón* with acquaintances and felt immediately dizzy and nauseous, ostensibly for no reason. I chalked it up to the heat and humidity and politely slipped out. Later, when describing this to my friends and interlocutors, they were amused by my naivete. They told me these experiences were actually explicit communications from my spirits to not engage with people who were not trustworthy. These symptoms were *conocimiento* (knowledge) my spirits communicated to me through my bodily sensations. Even without falling into trance, the body acts as a communicative tool shared between practitioner and *muerto*.

The body as a tool to communicate exemplifies how knowledge is grounded in experience. As Espirito Santo notes, 'spirits are first and foremost apprehended as encounters of the sensuous body' (2013: 38). A *cajón,* as a space reserved for such encounters, illustrates how words and actions—singing and dancing—are significant in their materialisation of

spirits. As will be further discussed, and as Espirito Santo highlights, though *espiritistas* are necessary to incarnate *muertos*, 'spirits belong to a realm that preexists any one medium's appropriation of [them]' (2015a: 265), they still must be sung and danced into material.

The smoky air, the pungent perfume, and the taste of golden rum all point to the importance of the senses in *Espiritismo Cruzado* practice. The use of substances can open the body up to sensation, which contributes to its ability to receive spirits. *Muertos* enjoy materialising in trance. I observed that they like experiences that are centred around powerful sensory interactions that emphasise the pleasures of embodiment.

Ingesting material substances like smoking tobacco, or drinking specific liquors were crucial, bodily engagements. Spirits' communication, as both knowledge and the production of it, are not then just about 'knowing or its absence' (Espírito Santo 2015b:580). More accurately, rather than a passive accumulation of information, knowledge acts within and upon the practitioner and her body thanks to these media. Substances contribute to ways of communicating with spirits. The substances and the *muertos* they signify are blurred (Meyer 2013: 316). Materials and substances are imbued with spiritual currents that sometimes pertain to particular categories of spirits.

For example, *aguardiente* is associated with *Africanos*, while beer is associated with *gitanas*. These associations, again, parallel gendered (and racialised) codings. *Aguardiente* is harsh, strong, and unrefined (cheap), i.e. masculine, pointing to the masculinity of *Africanos* as a category of spirits. Whereas beer is smooth, civilised, refined (expensive), i.e. feminine. When these substances are incorporated into one's body, spirits and their currents, can be more readily received. The relevant currents cultivated in *Espiritismo Cruzado* are equated with *caridad*es as embodied spiritual knowledge.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, however, consumption of any of these substances is not strictly required. Some *espiritistas* choose not to work via tobacco or liquor. This in no way detracts from one's spiritual ability. For example, Odalis does not typically work with tobacco, but nevertheless she is a very experienced practitioner. Further, consuming alcohol within spiritual or religious spaces does not necessarily translate into recreational drinking, especially not in the context of *Espiritismo Cruzado*. Some *espiritistas* drink during a *cajón* prior to falling into trance. However, drinking to excess, as opposed to in moderation and within particular spaces for precise reasons, was associated with men/*borrachos* (drunkards). While alcohol is something that is 'worked with,' inebriation is undesirable. Avoiding intoxication is not only for social reasons, such as stigma or lowered inhibitions, but also because it muddles the mind, potentially making communication less sharply-focused. As such, care is taken to ensure that if practitioners drink, they do not get drunk. This changes once the body-as-material is being utilised by the *muerto*, who harbours no such concern for overconsuming.

We began dancing, awkwardly at first, just shifting weight from one foot to another, but singing along. As our dancing became more animated, I noticed the smell in the room. It was not awful, but certainly unpleasant; the air was laced with the scent of sweat, body odour, and rum. It had a staleness to it, even though both the door and balcony were open. It was worth it though. Someone finally fell into trance; she kicked off her shoes, bent at her knees and danced more intensely, beginning to shake and crashing into people. Her hands grasped at the air. Though it seemed the spirit, someone's Francisca, was not yet ready to communicate, so we danced more and more, trying to bring her into being.

Then, after this, the spirit was ready and mounted the *espiritista*. The *muerta* offered practitioners advice regarding work, family, and life more

generally. ‘And her?’ Our host asked the Francisca and gestured with his head in my direction. Francisca made her way over to me. She was not speaking anymore, rather she communicated through bodily gestures. Lydia, being a very developed *espiritista*, served as an interpreter.

Using her chin, face, arms, and grunting noises, the spirit asked if I had *conocimiento* of her. Perhaps I had dreamed of her? I admitted I had not, or I did not think that I had. She told me to protect my eyes. She told me by passing her hands over her eyes then mine. For now, she said, I needed to protect myself from pregnancy to make sure my life would stay sweet. She asked for something. Lydia went quickly to retrieve it and brought a glass bottle full of honey. Francisca shook her head no. Lydia returned with a similar bottle filled with a darker, thicker liquid, molasses, I would later learn. Francisca poured some into her hands, it slowly ran down the neck of the bottle. She rubbed her palms together and then she covered my face with the sticky molasses, over my eyes and lips. I could taste the sweetness. It was warm, and I could feel it mat at my hairline.

Then she lifted my shirt. I instinctively pulled it back down again. I felt viscerally uncomfortable in a way I never really had during work with *muertos*, but everyone around me murmured it was ok. After being assured, I submitted and started to feel ok too, albeit exposed. I trusted Francisca and the other *espiritistas*. She rubbed the molasses over my belly, staining the edges of my clothes. I felt overwhelmed with emotion and neared tears. Then she said goodbye and concluded her presentation.

The molasses signified a spiritual embodiment of this Francisca’s *caridad*, and her smearing my body with it was a technique of transmitting her spiritual energy. Hurriedly, or perhaps absentmindedly, Lydia grabbed the bottle of honey, but Francisca wanted molasses. This again confirmed what interlocutors told me, that different categories of spirits, have not only associations, but preferences that parallel their racial codings. While

both honey and molasses are sweet, the former (lighter honey) is associated with *gitanas* and the latter (darker molasses) is associated with *Africanas*.

In this ethnographic example, material substances such as molasses act as mediums in their own right between humans and *muertos*. The molasses performed a connectivity between Francisca and me. Francisca's connection to and protection of me was enacted through the use of molasses on my body. Lydia told me the Francisca had engaged my body in a particular way to make sure I had my life sorted and had a child in conditions of 'sweetness.[64]' Both my body and the molasses were media insofar as bodies and things are technologies that can transport content, in this case, Francisca's *caridad* (cf. Meyer 2013: 313).

Media should not be taken to be a substitute or something that makes up for something else, a lack of immediacy. Instead media in this context can more appropriately be framed as 'instrumental tools or vehicles of content' (ibid), like conduits. In the dynamic between Francisca, the molasses and myself, as Meyer suggests, 'a medium becomes one with the substance it conveys' (ibid 316). Highly sensuous encounters such as the one between the Francisca and myself continue in demonstrating the relevance of the erotic to *Espiritismo Cruzado.* These encounters are sensory and intimate but beyond that they showcase a sharing and growing together through strong, deep feeling.

As Lorde's erotic outlines (2007[1984]), intersubjective sensuality is productive of knowledge as these fully experienced feelings provide for richer possibilities and safeguard against that which is unwanted or undesirable. The experience— which was made possible through the openness of the *espiritista*'s body— like the erotic, involves a recognition

[64] Though not necessarily the primary focus of this chapter, again an emphasis on motherhood and reproduction was ever present among my interlocutors.

of power (Francisca's) and a conscious decision to accept it (me being comfortable and allowing the *muerta* to work in this way.) Substances help *espiritistas* be acted upon by and unite with *muertos*. Like in chapter four with respect to *escuelitas*, I have shown how a *cajón* is also the result of a particularly cultivated environment. Substances, in addition to bodies, act as tools and media as well.

Dancing and Drumming

I present dancing and drumming as fundamental components that set a *cajón* apart as unique spiritual activity in *Espiritismo Cruzado* practice. It is dancing and drumming that allow for a *cajón* to take shape as lively parties that both *muertos* and *espiritistas* enjoy. Drumming and dancing are forms of sensorial communication that can contribute to bringing trance, and by extension knowledge production, into being. As Lambek shows, work with spirits, especially via trance possession, is productive of 'intimate, potent and embodied' knowledge (2002[1999]:70). In the context of *Espiritismo Cruzado*, this knowledge is productive of self, community, and practice (Lambek 2015[1993]; Espirito Santo 2009, 2015a).

Just a few months after having left, I got the chance to return to Habana for a short follow up fieldwork trip. Odalis and Lydia had invited me to a *cajón* in the *Santo Suarez* neighbourhood of *Diez de Octubre*. When Odalis and I arrived, Lydia was waiting with the young woman hosting. It was just them and the *cajoneros* (drummers). We decided to begin despite the small number of people because we were already so behind schedule. The young woman hosting was unsure. She kept saying, '*No sé, no estoy en esto'* (I do not know, I am not really in this). Odalis and especially Lydia helped her along. Though they were not particularly warm with their assistance. They seemed more frustrated that she did not know how to do things; or perhaps their frustration was that no one had properly taught her. The young woman had to learn in the moment.

More women shuffled in and we began opening orations. There were women who quickly began to put on long skirts they brought in plastic bags or tie handkerchiefs over their hair. I too put my hair into a knot on my head and wrapped it up in white scarf. After some time had passed Isabel arrived. We hugged tight. She told me I looked fat and well, but that I should not gain any more weight. We did not have much time to catch up as the drummers continued on. Between songs she told me, or rather said generally out loud, '*La india* still dances well!'

Dancing well is better framed as knowing how to dance properly and then taking that framework and making it your own, whilst still being in sync with the group's rhythm. Like engaging or properly ingesting certain substances, the movement of dance opens up your body in response to the music's rhythm. Dance is an erotic action in which the 'body opens stretches to music and opens up to in response' (Lorde 2007 [1984]:56). Modes of being, or rather processually becoming, an *espiritista* are shaped and reshaped by the contours of action. Dancing communicates to the spirits as knowledge is shared and relayed through the body. At the same time, sometimes little things like dancing can communicate one's knowledge of *la religión* to other *espiritistas* as well.

We continued dancing and singing. I could feel the drumming reverberate in my body, pounding in rhythm. Yet, for some time no one had materialised a spirit. There were some whose participation was lacklustre. Lydia looked at the people seated with disdain, 'Why come to a *cajón* if you are not going to dance?! People need to be on their feet! This is not right,' she continued to admonish them. Communal work in a *cajón* is most easily recognised through group dancing and drumming and this failure of attendants to fulfil their part upset Lydia.

We sipped at rum in small plastic cups and continued to sing. Singing should not be taken as a less physical act than dancing. Pérez's work on

African diaspora religiosity notes its importance and its less emphasised physicality: 'breath, saliva, and the vibration of [his or her] vocal cords; these elements combine with melody and the pounding of drums [. . .] alert spirits to the needs of their worshippers and persuade them to appear' (2010: 239). Despite rhetoric of *espiritista*-as-woman being innately open, actions like dancing, drinking and singing are all ways of opening oneself up to spirits and thus their spirituality and knowledge. Practice is interdependent and based in and on cooperative action.

I looked toward the drummers. They had such passionate expressions as they sang and played that their faces looked almost distorted as if they were in pain. As for us dancers, we kept up with the drummers. Our bodies found the angles of dance organically. Most *espiritistas* kept washcloths tucked in their bras for sweat and I regretted leaving mine in my bag. One *espiritista* neared trance several times, but never passed a spirit. For some time, no one did. We began to dance more ferociously than before, eyes tightly shut, but still stinging with sweat. I focused in on one of drummers. He was drumming hard, engrossed in the entirety of it.

He got up from drumming to hype the crowd up. He splashed us with cologne, making us sing and dance even louder and harder than we already were. Just as the cologne was not for our benefit to mask the scent of sweat, neither was dancing more energetically or enthusiastically necessarily about our enjoyment. These dynamics were explained to me as fostering relevant currents of energy. Spirits can animate *materia* (bodies, literally 'material') but actions like these animate spirits. Dancing, singing, drumming, drinking, are all done to both produce and *coger (*gather or 'catch') spiritual energy. This energy is mutually constructed by spirits and *espiritistas.* Because this spiritual energy produces a shared, creative and harmonious power, or capacity for action, it is akin to Lorde's erotic.

I suggest the erotic as a life force of creative energy is apparent in the way sensation feeds into the emotional, psychic, and physical in this spiritual practice. Together practitioners cultivate this energy as both part of and as necessary for practice. Jafari Allen also uses the erotic in examining race and sexuality in Cuba, his work captures the relationships between the erotic and 'communitas' (2011:96,130). In taking the 'erotic as a catalyst for community, a deeper understanding of the body and affective relationships is gained' (ibid 97). This idea of needing others (drummers, spirits, dancers, etc.) supports a framework of the erotic as feeling deeply and a mode of sharing that has to do with both consciousness and sensation (Lorde 2007 [1984]:57,59).

The louder and harder people sang and danced, and the more people doing this, the better; the spirits would be more attracted to the space. The drummers receive energy from the *espiritistas* as an audience through their dancing. The drummers also receive energy and inspiration from the *muertos*. Often song choice is attributed to *muertos,* at other times it is the inverse. That is, in some cases, the communication of a category of spirit may cause *espiritistas* to sing to them. Spirits' presentation precedes their songs rather than determining them.

In other instances, songs to a category of spirit are sung and their presentation comes after, as an almost invocation. Espirito Santo's assertion that 'muertos are both the source and the result of certain forms of awareness' (2013:38) rings true here. When working with *muertos* and other spirits you are singing to them, not about them. When determining a spirit's communication in relation to a song sung, cause and effect become cyclical, ends and means are sometimes conflated, and the dialogic nature is foregrounded as reflection and creation are muddled (cf. Lambek 2013:11).

Muertos are brought into being through both the drummers' playing and the *religiosos'* dancing. As an audience of dancers, we received the

energy from *muertos* and the drummers. All of us creating in conjunction, drummers drumming and *espiritistas* dancing, actualise the spirits materially, allowing them to come forth. Drumming allows for a suffuse energy that forms one kind of bridge between *muertos* and *espiritistas* during the *cajón*. The music further fuses spirits and practitioners (cf. Stoller 1986:112). Once an *espiritista* said to me in passing that drumming and dancing *made* you fall into trance. This comment was not meant to indicate a fail-safe, causal inevitability. Rather than taking this remark as deterministic, the comment shows the power of listening-as-feeling. Experiencing music, especially through rhythmic drumming, affects one's bodily engagement with the world, opening practitioners up to their *muertos*.

Listening/feeling can lead to trance, allowing for bodies to receive, 'recruit[ing] your body's responsiveness.' Experiencing the rhythm appropriately is like a complex sensory skill (cf. Hirschkind 2006:70). Listening together, like the concept of developing together in the previous chapter, means a transference of affect (ibid). Listening together and experiencing drumming contributes to the necessary, transformative capacity of achieving trance, the goal of the *cajón*. This 'listening establishes the conditions of intersubjectivity' (ibid) between *espiritistas* and *muertos* and amongst *espiritistas*.
Working together, with the energy created, this collective of Black and *Mulata espiritistas*, mostly women, embodied modes of knowledge production. Again, erotic spiritual connections such as these combine the physical, psychic, emotional, and intellectual (Lorde 2007 [1984]). These connections come together in the body of the *espiritista* when she is mounted by the spirit. Knowledge is localised in the body and through such knowledge and bodies communities are created and fostered. We sang more. Singing—words, sounds, vibrations—formulate a dialectic power during *cajón* activities, calling out to spirits and nourishing their presence once they have come (cf. Stoller 1986:43).

The singer, Yordanka, was a dark-skinned Black woman. She wore a handkerchief, she was corpulent, and had a serious, deep voice. She was deemed a somewhat polarising figure as she tended to sing to any *prendas* if any pertained to the house. Singing for *prendas* was something a few *espiritistas* did not like as they felt it was 'too material' for spiritual work. These critiques of Yordanka seem to try to reify the binary of material versus spiritual, despite the demonstration that *Espiritismo Cruzado* praxis itself does not support it. I also draw attention to Yordanka because unlike her, most singers were men who did not identify as *espiritistas*.

Yordanka, in contrast, was said to be an experienced practitioner. My mentioning of interlocutors' race/colour is significant for wider motivations of telling Black women's stories. However, I draw attention to Yordanka being dark-skinned Black in particular, not as mere ethnographic description, and certainly not to essentialise, but to signal the reader back to chapter one's conversation regarding archetypes like Yemayá, *Congas*, and Franciscas—all of whom flip the script on dark-skinned mammy archetypes and demonstrate the strength and spirituality of Black women.

Yordanka, strong and spiritual, fits in with these characterisations. She was understood as necessarily aggressive, not domineering, reflecting culturally contextual notions of femininity and especially motherhood. Her voice was loud and commanding, and boomed over the drumming when she yelled at someone who was looking at their watch for not moving: 'Is your *muerto* coming at a specific time?? No? Move! Dance! The *muertos* will not come if we do not do our part!'

Yordanka was stressing how drumming and dancing necessarily have to be enacted simultaneously, performed in conversation as a kind of dialogue centred around the rhythm. With dancer feeding drummer, and vice versa, all create the energy to bring spirits forth. Again, these

creative actions of communicating are ways of sharing knowledge. Espirito Santo argues that in *Espiritismo* practice there is, '…an ongoing and ontologically crosscutting dialogue between the universe of tangible, physical substances, on the one hand, and on the other, a domain of entities that not only "materialize" via these substances but that are in turn enabled by these into acting back upon matter, world, persons, with efficacy and presence' (2015a:244).

I have shown the significance of drumming and dancing, both as actions that distinguish a *cajón* from other activities relevant to *Espiritismo Cruzado* practice, and as contributors to an energy and openness necessary for trance. The above quotation discusses the crosscutting ontology of material and spiritual, paying attention to the way materialisation can allow for actors to engage the world efficaciously. Below I examine questions of materialisation in more depth. While a *cajón* is a party, it does have a goal, for practitioners to fall into trance and for *muertos* to make their presentations through their *caballos*' material.

Materia **(Material/Bodies)**

Lorde describes the erotic as an assertion of the life force of women (2007 [1984]:55), a concept I suggest is paralleled through trance in a shared body. I have detailed that erotic knowledge production in *Espiritismo Cruzado* is a resource that allows *espiritistas* to improve the practical realities of everyday life. In this section I shift focus to what an *espiritista*'s shared body can provide for *muertos,* speaking again to the idea of *espiritista*-as-mother due to mothers' frequent characterisation as providers. While trance is one of several methodologies of communication through which *muertos* make their presentations, trance offers spirits something unique: the opportunity to be in a body. Most *muertos* I know enjoy dancing and often called for their *espiritistas* to hold a *cajón* so they would have the chance to do so. Embodiment allows for *muertos* to

engage practitioners and experience the world in a way that is otherwise difficult for them.

After just a few more songs Lydia began to fall fully into trance. Odalis once jokingly said that Lydia *se monta* (is mounted by a spirit) even upon hearing *Los Van Van*, a popular Cuban *charanga*[65] group to indicate how prone Lydia was to trance. Lydia's body's sharp movements loosened. She was mounted by her Francisca. Francisca appeared agitated and seemed to be asking for something, but no one could understand what, '*¿Qué quiere noble ser*?' ('What do you want, noble being?') Finally, she grabbed hold of my skirt. She was displeased that Lydia had worn cropped jeans and not a long skirt. Someone came back moments later and gave her the dark blue and white gingham skirt that Lydia had in her bag. Francisca put the long skirt on over the trousers.

Spirits want to be embodied, but they want to be embodied properly. *Muertos* often made demands of their *caballos* regarding dress (cf. Lambek 2002 [1999]:242-43). These demands are usually made along gendered lines. As with food and drink, spirits have other particular aesthetic tastes. As I observed it, *muertas* asked their *espiritistas* to wears skirts; *muertos* asked for sack shorts. On one occasion at a *cajón*, I recall Gema from the previous chapter wearing sack shorts under her skirt. She fell in and out of trance with spirits of both *muertos* and *muertas.* Upon arriving the spirit could then easily put on or take off the skirt.[66]

In this case, with Lydia and her Francisca, the colour of the skirt, blue, also serves to locate a *muerta* easily into spiritual frameworks. Because

[65] Popular genre of Cuban dance music.
[66] It is worth noting which spirits make what claims on their *caballos.* I never witnessed a *muerta* request a man wear a skirt. I heard of this taking place only once. This is juxtaposed to homosexual men who are children of women *orichas*, who often wear dress (specifically skirts) representative of them for dances of veneration.

Franciscas have *tendencias* (tendencies towards, or affinities to) with Yemayá, they are often, though not exclusively, associated with the colour blue. *Gitanas*, frequently associated with *Ochún*, are often identified by and with the colour yellow. Often dress, then, is a means to quickly, visually communicate to others what category of spirit a *muerto* is.

Figure 9: Example of a skirt

It is important that for Francisca to be totally pleased with her state of embodiment, she would want her dress to be appropriate. In addition to relating to gender construction, there is also a historical component to *muertos'* requests of clothing. Odalis and Ines told me that *muertos* wanted to wear clothes that they recognised. This meant not only clothing more traditionally defined according to gender, but also clothing that they wore in their life. In this way, clothing has 'a metonymic relationship to the self; in other words, it was considered to be an integral part of the person who wore it' (Drasnart 1992:146).

Practically speaking, skirts also complemented the movement of dance. Francisca bunched her skirt at the sides and grabbed the gathered fabric,

elbows akimbo. She swished the skirt as she danced. After just one song Francisca then went to the *cuarto de Santo* (room of *Santo)* where objects for *oricha* worship are laid out. Francisca dropped to the floor, flat, in a position of supplication to the *santos.* She was in front of a solid blue tureen. She shook the maraca enthusiastically. One *espiritista* explained to me that in life this Francisca must have been a *santera*, and a daughter of Yemayá. Whilst in Lydia's material body, Francisca was able to pay respects to Yemayá, worshipping her in a way that required a body to communicate honour.

Francisca got to her feet. She cupped fistfuls of water from the *palangana* splashing the crowd then she passed her hands over her body, 'to cleanse my *caballo*.' She had a smile on her face now and chortled loudly as she began to furiously dance up onto people. She asked for *aguardiente*. ¡*Que rico*! (How delicious!) she exclaimed, gulping voraciously. Then she asked for tobacco inhaling greedily and puffing out the smoke. She dictated to the *cajoneros* (drummers) which songs she wanted to hear, and they happily obliged. Her movements were all exaggerated. She continued beaming and dancing, eyes closed.

This Francisca's attitude and comportment exemplify the most obvious and overt component of spirits' desire to materialise: to experience sensuous pleasures. A *cajón* is after all a party, following this, it makes sense *muertos* want to enjoy themselves. Often times my interlocutors and I discussed the ways *espiritistas* want to communicate with *muertos*, and especially fall into trance. Spirits want to mount their *caballos* as well, not only to help and guide *espiritistas*, but also to have embodied experiences.

Francisca went around the room giving each of us our own personal messages. She shouted and approached each person holding their hands first but then violently tugging at their arms, she spun each person twice around and then told them something. When it was my turn Francisca

took my hands and told me I needed to carry out a *limpieza* (cleansing) on myself before I left. I needed to take an egg—but not a cold egg—and pass it over my body. Then I should smash it in the street, on the corner, and after doing so not look back. Then she yanked roughly down on my arms and spun me twice before moving on the next person. Odalis wanted to make sure I understood the spirit's instructions, 'You yourself can do this. And after you break it, do not look back!' I nodded. Afterward, as if content to have completed her task of communicating to each of us, Francisca left. Lydia, exhausted, went off to sit down in front of the fan.

Negativity in my life or that might await me would be partially absorbed or 'recovered' through the material used for the *limpieza*. In this case, an egg. It would happen as a result of passing it over my body. There would be a transference between the two materials, body and egg. To purge the negativity, I would then need to smash the egg and not look back. I was told I needed to have faith that it broke. I would know from the smashing noise. Francisca's advice highlights the way different spiritual energies are embodied—both in my body and in the egg. However, it also makes reference to questions of sense. I could not look back, I had to trust the sound of the egg breaking to know it had worked. While Francisca was in a material state, she was able to directly communicate in detail the actions I needed to undertake for this *limpieza*. Apart from the use of Lydia's material body, Francisca was able to communicate with me without any intermediaries.

As discussed at other points in the thesis, my interlocutors placed importance on drawing lines and creating binaries. Yet, like other religious traditions of 'immanence' (cf. Lambek 2013:15), within *Espiritismo Cruzado* practice, spiritual actors and currents are pervasive and lines drawn to create dichotomies such as those between the material and the spiritual are hazy at best. The activity of the *cajón* draws attention to the importance and prevalence of creative spiritual

processes. In the context of trance in *Espiritismo Cruzado* practice, there is no doubt that the *espiritista* is not simply translating for the *muerto*. In trance, lines between the two actors disintegrate as *muertos* embody living material. *Espiritista* becomes *muerto* and viceversa; material becomes spirit and the inverse as well.

Conclusion

This chapter has looked at how spirits want to be embodied. The social, spiritual space of the *cajón* highlights uses of the body. I have also continued in demonstrating how these spaces constitute and contribute to each *espiritistas'* personal practice, but also a sense of a larger collective as a community. However, in focusing on a *cajón*, which is usually held at the behest of spirits, I aimed to elucidate that trance is a contributing factor in *muertos*' requests. I explored how and why trance is a desired state for spirits.

To showcase the necessary conditions for *muertos* to be embodied I addressed some of the techniques deployed for their materialisation. The activity of a *cajón* also draws attention to the way different articulations of words and actions—singing and dancing—contribute to materialising spirits. Dance acts as a privileged form of dialogic communication between spirits and practitioners. (Harding 2006: 1). Rhythms incite the bodies of *espiritistas* and thus cultivate *muertos*.

I have explored how spirits have the chance to engage the world in an embodied way through trance. The activity of the *cajón* also highlights that one of the primary reasons *muertos* want to be embodied is to experience sensory pleasures. I have continued in showing how knowledge is embodied and apprehended through senses. Hearing, sight, smell, touch, taste, etc. are all taken seriously in *Espiritismo Cruzado* practice. In this, knowledge production happens during the *cajón* through communal, creative processes.

The dynamics of *Espiritismo Cruzado* as demonstrated in a *cajón* show that spirits and practitioners are in constant interaction, forming a unique ontological perspective (Espirito Santo 2015a:210). Further, this interaction allows both parties to benefit and develop spiritually. I have used the *cajón* to illustrate how *Espiritismo Cruzado* practice more broadly indexes a hyper sensory, embodied experience of spiritual relationships. Within *Espiritismo Cruzado* practice, knowledge production and praxis are inseparable. Knowledge is owed to the symbiotic processes between *muertos* and practitioners who work together, though not equally, in producing knowledge. On varying levels, *Espiritismo* is predicated on an understanding of inter-ontological connectivity (Espirito Santo 2013: 42). While the thesis discusses embodiment at length, this chapter is distinct because it examined what trance and bodies mean for *muertos*. While the spirits allow for *espiritistas* to have access to and embody certain forms of knowledge, in trance, *espiritistas* provide material for *muertos* to have embodied experiences.

If it seems that my experiences, sensory or otherwise, are foregrounded in this chapter, the goal is not to navel-gaze or put myself in the centre surrounded by interlocutors who are a supporting cast of characters. The intention is that in considering how I related to the ethnographic context, I have followed Stoller's (1986) suggestion of making ethnography more vivid and accessible by privileging not just what I saw, but also what I felt, heard, tasted, and smelled in order to 'render [my] accounts of others more faithful to the realities of the field' (9). Examining my engagement is particularly necessary when talking about sensuous experience. As Lorde writes, 'The erotic cannot be felt second hand' (2007 [1984]:59). Through Lorde's erotic, this chapter pays attention to both enactment and experience; the making and doing; the activity itself and what is produced through that activity (see also Lambek 2013:8). The ambiguous line between spirit and practitioner is most blurred in trance as means of communication. In the chapter that follows I elaborate on some of the

relevant dynamics of trance and unpack the complicated lines between practitioner and spirit.

Chapter Six: *Muerto Tuyo* (Your Spirit)

Introduction

The day was hot, unbearably so. I felt the sweat dripping down my face and my ponytail sticking to the back of my neck. I felt bad for Odalis who was unwell. The heat had given her an upset stomach, but she insisted she was well enough to sit at the *bóveda* and work with the *muertos*. Suddenly Odalis was mounted by a spirit. Her hands were reaching up with arms bent at right angles; she shook and made a humming noise, breathing deeply. The *muerto* knocked on the ground and began, as is custom, by saying, 'Good morning, good afternoon, good night.'

We responded, as it was afternoon, 'Good afternoon, *noble ser* [noble being].'

The *muerto* said, 'José Francisco before you.' He was named José Francisco, just like Claudia's *muerto principal***.** Because often *Africanos* (African spirits, usually synonymous with *Congos*) have the same few names: José Francisco, Francisco, Tomasa, Francisca etc. I assumed the *muerto*'s name was a coincidence. José Francisco grunted, 'I cannot take it anymore!' He then said, 'I ask forgiveness for entering this material, but now I cannot take it anymore,' his eyes were closed but it was as if he was looking straight at Claudia, 'Get in the game!' he told her, 'I am in this horse who is not mine.'

This José Francisco was Claudia's *muerto principal*, without a doubt. He was contemptuous but still in his apology recognised he had crossed a line to make his point: Claudia's lacklustre engagement with her spiritual development meant that to communicate with her in a way she would listen to he had to mount Odalis. This interaction was the only time I had ever heard of or seen a *muerto* mount another *espiritista*. I gathered from the level of surprise that it never happens. However, it seemed to not be too grave a taboo on the part of José Francisco. Rather, it reflected a

stubbornness and even perhaps laziness on Claudia' s part. Claudia responded to him, 'I tend to you…'

But before she really could say anything, before she could begin defending herself, he boomed, 'You have to do more! Understand? Give me a maraca, place some flowers for me!' He stood. Despite Odalis not being very tall, his presence intimidated all of us, or at least, certainly me. I was grateful I had not incurred his wrath.

Claudia replied, 'Yes, but I do not know what to do or how.'

He told her to ask her mother if she did not know, 'You are not going to prosper until you do what you need to do. I ask forgiveness for entering this material that is not mine,' he referred again to Odalis. He repeated, 'If you do not know, ask your mother, your aunt, your cousin. Do not close yourself off.'

José Francisco went on, 'Do you want to be a crazy person in the street? I am going to give you everything that you want but you cannot fight this.' He swallowed his words and spoke in *bozal* (broken Spanish spoken by enslaved Africans). He said, 'I am not going to talk anymore! You are here because you are forced to be here, but it cannot be by obligation! Your heart needs to be in this. I have many things to give you, but I make you ugly, crazy, skinny and I will do this until you put yourself in this and work with me.'

He went on lecturing her, 'We go where people give us light, I am distancing myself from you. You want to *hacerse santo*? You depend on me before anything!'
I recognised his body language and the gestures he was making from when he normally mounted Claudia. He had an aggressive, straightforward attitude. He scolded her further, 'You think you are strong and tough? I am stronger and tougher. I am going to give you

opportunities. Do not be afraid little girl, but if I do not love you, no one will love you. I am leaving now with the permission of this horse.' He had his arms at right angles again and circled his body round and round from the waist. He shook, his face strained, and loudly made noises, 'eh-eh-eh.'

Odalis fell out of trance and started to cleanse herself at the *bóveda*, 'Man, this guy is running around all over the place!' We recited a *padre nuestro,* but Odalis went on shaking her head, 'And he mounts me? Me who is not feeling well? Oh no, little girl. Wow.' She addressed a by now absent José Francisco, 'Go to the mother,' she said looking at Ines. 'I know I have *hecho de* Eleggúa,[67] but I am just the aunt.'

Afterwards, Odalis, Ines, Claudia and I sat and chatted about what had happened. Sharing coffee from a single small cup we enjoyed the welcome but infrequent breeze that crept through the door which was held open via a latch. We discussed Claudia's situation and what was necessary for her to do to progress and develop spiritually. She needed to do cleansings. Ines would give her money to pay the *derecho* (fee). Odalis said during the *escuelita* she saw José Francisco; she saw him in the wild with grass taller than him, looking wide-eyed at Claudia**.** 'See? See, Aly?' Ines said to me, though it seemed directed at Claudia. 'If you do not concentrate, there are repercussions.'

José Francisco's questioning of Claudia, 'Do you want to be a crazy person in the street?' draws attention to the way *muertos* have the ability to impact the lives of practitioners. The vignette above also highlights that the crossing of boundaries— an *espiritista*'s *muerto* mounting someone else—takes place, and when it does, the assumed, privileged link between *espiritista* and *muerto* is disrupted. While *muertos* provide

[67] As mentioned earlier in the thesis, Eleggúa is Odalis' *oricha*. He is the *oricha* of in-betweeness, he's often characterised as a playful, mischievous trickster. He opens up paths.

opportunities for *espiritistas* and do real work to improve their lives, they can also withhold their help causing varying consequences. José Francisco states that he has the capability to affect Claudia's life on the level of her physical appearance. He threatens, or rather underscores, that if she does not put in the effort to actively spiritually develop, he can make her 'ugly, crazy, skinny.'

I suggest that there are often disconnections between *espiritista* and *muerto.* Such disconnections can show us what *espiritistas* care about (or at the very least my interlocutors) whilst also problematising narratives surrounding the relationships between *espiritista* and *muerto*. That is, that *muertos* comprise *espiritistas*' selfhood. In highlighting disconnections, the chapter sheds further light on some under discussed concerns of *espiritistas*. I have demonstrated at other points of the thesis the ways *Espiritismo Cruzado* is in dialogue with practical concerns that my interlocutors classify as '*inventando*' (inventing, getting by). I showcase some of *espiritistas'* concerns which often centre around questions of gender (masculinity and femininity), valorisations of racialised beauty, and sexuality. I take this opportunity to draw attention to concerns that go beyond my interlocutors' material circumstances. Yet I maintain that the relationships between religiosity and the management of everyday life in a socio-economic sense is ubiquitous and by no means isolated from questions of gender, beauty, race, or sexuality (see Härkönen 2016:113-114).

I contend that everyday concerns cannot be eclipsed by wider theoretical arguments. Starting from the issues that are important for *espiritistas* themselves provides an entry point to wider questions or debates. Discontinuations between the two actors, *espiritista* and *muerto*, do not just problematise the idea that that the two are straightforwardly united, that an *espiritista* and her *muertos* have a direct connection and that *espiritistas* are made up of their spirits. They can equally focus in on the anxieties my interlocutors nurse. In this way, I build on wider claims that understanding the lived experiences of my interlocutors' religiosity

necessitates a framing that not only provides space for their gendered and racialised experiences, identities, and subjectivities but that foregrounds them. As is indicated throughout the thesis, in the context of *la religión*, religiosity is an entry point for race and gender as much as race and gender are entry points for religiosity.

First, I lay out the framework of common narratives upon which I am intervening. These narratives can be found both in the way my interlocutors relayed information to me and the relevant literature (Espirito Santo 2015a). I concretise this narrative in the relationship that Claudia has with a spirit in her *cuadro espiritual*. I show that both Claudia and this spirit, a *Conga*, point to how racialised beauty is conceived of and experienced. Then I provide an example of conflict in Claudia's relationship with her *muerto principal*, José Francisco. This conflict speaks to dynamics of selfhood but also addresses a kind of failure to meet gender ideals in relation to one's body. Continuing with ideas of beauty, José Francisco and Claudia negotiate their tensions through their bodies.

Next, I lay out the relationship between Eduardo and his *gitana* (gypsy) spirit, whom he has disinclinations about passing. Recalling chapter one's discussion of how spirits can be associated with masculinity or femininity, I unpack how such correlations make it troublesome for Eduardo to work with his *muerta* due to her hyperfeminine codings and how such codings might impact his masculinity. Both Claudia and Eduardo have concerns of falling short of gender ideals in relation to either the way the body looks (Claudia) or what the body does and how it acts (Eduardo). Below, however, I first lay out certain discourses surrounding the way spirits and *espiritistas* relate to one another, primarily with an assemblage of the former comprising the latter.

Context and 'the Self'

On the whole my interlocutors' life stories of spiritual development and their relationships with their *muertos* convincingly illustrated to me that an *espiritista* is especially bonded with the *muertos* in her *cuadro espiritual*. These usual connections are what makes the obstacles encountered and fractures between *muerto* and *espiritista* that I discuss all the more compelling. As I have intimated elsewhere, it was made clear to me that one is formed by one's *muertos*. For example, if you have a particularly 'strong' or spiritually potent *muerto*, that increases the capital of your spiritual power. Or if you are an exceptionally good dancer, you are not just seen as gifted and valuable but gifted and valuable owed to your having a spirit who was a good dancer during life.

One *espiritista* and *palera* told me she was a very serious person, that is why, in her opinion, she looked older than her actual age. She went on to say her seriousness and appearance, which she considers masculine, were because her *muerto principal* is a man. She also told me, 'you can tell, sometimes, just by looking at someone if their *muerta principal is* a *gitana*, you can tell because they are feminine and beautiful.' Both descriptions of her appearance show the way *espiritistas* frame spirits' influence unfolding in their looks. What is especially telling is the idea of a *gitana* spirit as your *muerta principal* making you more feminine or beautiful. This will relate to the uneasiness Eduardo has about his *gitana* that I expand on later in the chapter.

I recall one occasion during our routine spiritual practice when María was giggling. Odalis commented that she was giggling because of the spirit of María's *gitana*. Odalis saw her laughing and spinning in circles. The *gitana* had long black hair and her lips were painted red. Odalis made a connection there as well, 'That is why the little girl likes to wear red lipstick so much!' María's penchant for sneaking her mother's lipstick was not just her developing a liking for makeup or her personality as silly and

fun loving. It pointed to the way unique selves gradually develop alongside and through one's spirits and one's spirituality.

Another interlocutor's sassy attitude was attributed to the sassiness of a spirit in their *cuadro espiritual*. These qualities were something you had in relation to your spirits, demonstrating the way *espiritistas* as selves are a mixture of practitioner as person and spirits as persons. This complexity drives home that *espiritistas* are not static subjects but defined through their relationships with *muertos*. As such, *Espiritismo Cruzado* essentially unfolds as relationships between inseparable actors. People do not take on traits of their spirits, nor are they believed to mirror them. Rather they are understood to already possess them by the very nature of the makeup of their *cuadro espiritual*. This idea of a person and their path being constituted by their *muertos* is reflected in spiritual and religious practice as well. One might only be able to initiate in *Palo* if they have a *ngangulero* in their *cuadro espiritual*. Or, if they have a *ngangulero* in their *cuadro espiritual*, he or she might require the practitioner to initiate. If an *espiritista* is prone to falling sick, she might have a spirit with *tendencia* (affinity) with Babalú Ayé/San Lázaro, the *oricha* who is associated with illness, health, and healing.

Espirito Santo (2015a:210) cites Honwana (2002: 14) as most accurately representing the dynamic of spiritual agents and humans. 'This interpenetrative nature of spirits and humans allows us to consider spirits not just as external agents that control and produce changes in the identities of persons, but as the very essence of human identity.' However, this fact that spirits and *espiritistas* make each other up does not exactly mean that their relationships always flow smoothly. This chapter examines what was particularly intriguing to me: the disjunctions that upset or at least impacted the apparently given, 'natural' connections between *muerto* and *espiritista*.

Spiritual Development and Physical Appearance

In this section I discuss the relationship Claudia has with two of her *muertos*, one a *Conga* and another, her *muerto principal,* José Francisco. Below, I first examine the dynamics between Claudia and her *Conga.* This relationship offers an example of a baseline of standard spirit/ *espiritista* narratives. That is, *muertos* mapping onto practitioners and making them up as selves.

Racialised Beauty: Black Women with White Noses

The understanding that spirits make up selves seen in anthropological examinations of *Espiritismo* (Espirito Santo 2012; 2013; 2015a; 2015b; 2015c) mirrors the way my interlocutors typically framed their relationships to *muerto*s as well. However, I argue that conceptual frameworks of selfhood must account for *espiritistas*' concrete, lived experiences. In this case, the example of Claudia and her *Conga* allows me to address racialised beauty norms. This *muerta* and Claudia not only illustrate an understanding of spirits making up selves, their dynamic also examines the way beauty exists on a particular continuum because of its relationship to race.

Not long after we had sat down to work with *muertos*, Ines got up, placing some newspaper she was using to fan herself on her chair, so as not to 'break' the circle. She grabbed the purple cloth that belonged to her and Odalis' deceased mother. Ines blew smoke on the fabric; then with the tobacco resting between her teeth, she crumbled *cascarilla* over it. She went around the circle. Each of us arose one by one to meet her in the centre of our small, misshapen circle, the diameter spanning only four or five feet. Working from the assumption that because each person is so linked to spirits, in this case their *oricha* (whether they have *hecho santo*

or not or even knew who their *oricha* is), whoever is *despojando* needs to ask the person's *oricha* for permission.

'*Con el permiso de tu ángel de guardia.'* (With the permission of your guardian angel [*oricha*]). Ines shook the cloth over and around each of us, twirling us each once clockwise and then counter clockwise. Then, after throwing the cloth over her shoulder, she took hold of both hands and yanked them down roughly. Afterward we said a *padre nuestro.*

Odalis told Claudia she saw one of her spirits, a woman. Odalis described her as a *negra fina* (refined). She appeared to Odalis to be a *Conga* who had a *tendencia* with (affinity to) Yemayá. 'It is too bad we do not have *aguardiente* for her,' Odalis lamented the lack of resources. She described the *Conga* as smart and attractive. 'Her face is just like yours,' she went on to say. Claudia said she knew who Odalis was referring to.

'Oh yes, her nose especially is good like mine: thin, nice.'

'*Luz*,' Odalis said in acknowledgement, 'she is not a field slave at all, you would not find her in the slave barracks. She did not associate with just anyone.' This characterisation of the *muerta* and Claudia was indicative of other detailed conversations and off-hand comments that occurred during my fieldwork. Alongside taxonomies of nose and eye shape and amid countless mentions of 'good' and 'bad' hair, the words of one interlocutor stick out: '*Soy una negra fea*' (I am an ugly Black [woman]). This *religiosa* described her race and skin colour and her perceived ugliness as coming together in one fell swoop. Here, as Almeida Junco writes, 'the phenotypic characteristics of Black women are posited alongside [a] model [of taxonomies] and continuously devalued and assigned a pejorative symbolic charge' (2011:135).[68]

[68] Original quotation in Spanish: 'las características fenotípicas de las mujeres Negras son enfrentadas con este modelo y por consiguiente

Like other countries that employ rhetoric similar to Cuban *mulatez* (racial mixture), idealised beauty is located in a 'hybrid body' (Edmonds 2010). In other words, being beautiful means looking mixed. Usually however these notions of mixedness are configured without interrogating the troubled historical conditions of mixture. Beauty, then, is akin to patterns of both remembering and forgetting racist colonial hierarchies and histories (Edmonds 2010:30), as I expand upon shortly. Beauty and dynamics of remembering/forgetting relate to *muertos* as they too actively participate in discourses of gendered and racialised beauty ideals.

Fanon talks about historico-racial corporeal schema in terms of the body as that which structures the self and the kind of dialectic that is formed between the world and the body in a way that may be particularly relevant here (1986[1952]). Further, Fanon discusses racial ideologies of beauty, speaking at length on the relationship between Blackness and ugliness. However, questions of racialisation and racialised beauty do not begin or end with skin colour coding alone.

Facial phenotypic characteristics, noses in this example, are also given massive importance as racial signifiers. In popular social perceptions a 'nice' (long, slender) nose is valued over a wide, thick nose (Edmonds 2007; 2010; Twine 1998:90; Candelario 2007). If, as Candelario suggest, in the context of the Hispanic Caribbean '"Blackness" is discerned through a sometimes contradictory, but cohesive, system of bodily signs: hair, skin, nose, and mouth' (2000:144), it might be easy to assert Claudia and the *muerta's* Black skin did not prevent them from having 'White' noses.[69] Like race, beauty exists on a continuum. Following these cohesive

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continuamente devaluadas y nombradas con una carga simbólica peyorativa.'

[69] Sometimes, dark-skinned people with 'White' phenotypic features are classified as '*Moros*'. However, this racial category was never referenced in relation to Claudia.

contradictions, such noses might give Black women like Claudia and her *Conga* a proximity to Whiteness.

At times I witnessed the racist equating of Whiteness with intelligence or virtue (Roland 2011). However, when it comes to beauty, in the Cuban setting I observed that Blackness does not necessarily sit in opposition to Whiteness as beautiful. It is rather the *Mulata* who is read as emblematic of beauty. As in other post-plantation slavery sites in Latin America and the Caribbean (Edmonds 2010: 25; Candelario 2000) the *Mulata* is a national figure of femininity, beauty, and feminine sexuality. However, she is also a tacit and recurring reminder of *blanqueamiento* (whitening), though without acknowledgement of its associated violence. The *Mulata* Cuban body is configured as a tempering of perceptions of White women as frigid or lacking sensuality and Black women as obscenely sexual (Hobson 2003:97).

Blackness' indexing of hypersexuality does not dislocate or disassociate it from ugliness, rather the two are intertwined and depend on each other (Hernton 1988 [1965]). Historically rooted (and presently occurring) dehumanisation of Black bodies serves to pose them as both grotesque and lascivious, this coding is especially—but by no means exclusively—applicable to women. Within Cuban regimes of colour coding, light skinned but of Colour (*Mulata*) is the most favourable. I interpret the status of the *Mulata* as meaning that beauty entails a proximity to Whiteness but without phenotypically presenting as White. Valorising aesthetics that are associated with *mulatez* means that traditional Global North, White standards of beauty are not the reference point, but it also still means that Blackness or (most) Black features are devalued as well. That is, while Whiteness is not considered beautiful, Blackness and/or Black features continue to be considered ugly (Hobson 2003:98).

Ideas of beauty are gendered. Being mixed and being beautiful seemed to both be tacitly coded as feminine qualities. Men can be beautiful, but

again I usually observed *Mulato* men as the ones most often labelled this way. Both men and women place a great emphasis on being well groomed and smelling nice. My interlocutors, regardless of gender, emphasise ideas of looking *arreglado* (put together).

For most of my women friends looking *arreglado* meant dressing nicely, wearing jewellery (especially earrings) and having their nails done. Generally, men should have their hair well-combed and be clean shaven. Depending on age, it seemed their sense of looking nice also often centred around having well maintained brand-name sneakers that people sold on the grey market. Men being physically attractive is a plus, but for the Cubans I know it is equally, if not more important, that he have '*condiciones*'[70] (material resources) (see also Härkönen 2016).

Claudia saw a parallel between herself and this *muerta*, one others recognised as well. Claudia's physical appearance was mirrored back by this *Conga*. She literally saw herself in the spirit, cultivating and cementing a sense of self. This reflection in physical appearance contributes to a form of interchangeable, mutually constructed selfhood—for both the *muerta* and Claudia, but especially Claudia. Claudia's reaction to her *muerta* demonstrates the way the two women were interwoven, an entwinement Claudia seemed pleased with. The dynamic between the *Conga* and Claudia illuminates relevant racialised beauty norms and demonstrates the way wider conversations regarding the self must be in conversation with experiences of race and gender.

In mentioning 'good,' 'nice' noses there is a mimetic relationship between Claudia and the *muerta* at play. Claudia as a 'self' is indeed emergent as

[70] As Cuba's economic system has two currencies, 'material resources' meant access to the CUC (Cuban convertible peso) economy rather than just state salaries paid in *moneda nacional* (Cuban national money). £1 is roughly 1.27 CUC and 1 CUC fluctuates to valuing about 24 or 25 *pesos moneda nacional*.

she relates to her *muertos*. The self emerges through a *muerto/*practitioner dialogue that exists within contextual hegemonic race, beauty, and gender norms. Below I continue with the topic of beauty norms in looking at an interaction between Claudia and her *muerto principal*, José Francisco. I advance the chapter building from the foundation that the relationship between Claudia and her *Conga* offers. While this example has provided a base of more typical *muerto/espiritista* relationships, the following ethnographic illustration offers an instance of instability between *espiritistas* and *muertos*.

'Until She Makes Me Handsome, I Will Keep Her Ugly'

The dynamic between Claudia and the *muerta* above is indicative of a straightforward narrative of spirit/*espiritista* as detailed earlier. Alongside this, together Claudia and her *Conga* showed that selves are experientially (inter)dependent on different factors, for example, racialised beauty norms. Now I offer another ethnographic moment centred around Claudia that provides a different example. I present the ways spirit and *espiritista* can find themselves at odds in a sort of disharmony. This disharmony engages a long-standing, previously touched upon issue for Claudia: her weight. Her family, spirits, and she herself all believed her to be too skinny.

They all equated skinniness with ugliness, all wanted her to gain weight, and all saw her weight as linked to her spiritual development. The interaction between Claudia and José Francisco below provides an entry point to Claudia's anxieties about her appearance, particularly her weight. Likewise, Claudia's relationship to her body image is reflected in her spiritual practice. The following Saturday afternoon while working with our *muertos*, as I sang with eyes closed, I suddenly felt a weight on my thighs. I opened my eyes and found that María had hastily climbed onto my lap. It seemed like Claudia was going to fall into trance and María

knew that meant she could not sit on her mother's lap until the spirit came and went.

With my eyes now open I saw Odalis mime pulling a rope from Claudia while Ines made kissy noises at her. Claudia shut her eyes and massaged the bridge of her nose with her thumb and index finger. Her legs bounced and shook. José Francisco came with great force. With hands on his hips, he rocked back and forth, nodding his head vigorously. He said 'step by step, little by little, I send her [Claudia] tasks—things to complete. I help her, but she needs to be serious.'

He asked for *aguardiente*. Odalis poured some for him in a *jícara* (drinking receptacle) and he drank greedily. José Francisco continued, 'she does not want to believe in us.' Odalis told him Claudia will once he sends more *prueba* (proof), understandable given previously addressed notions of belief in the thesis. That is, belief not as an abstraction that precedes practical action, but rather that it is generated by it. Ines asked about the *Conga* spirit that she saw the previous Sunday: the pretty girl. Odalis told José Francisco that she
saw that Claudia needed to pass that spirit to help with her love life.

At this point of my fieldwork, Claudia was single which was a cause for worry. For men and women alike, often being romantically unattached suggested a state of sadness or dysfunction. Again, returning to the ubiquitous presence and importance of reproduction, Härkönen notes: 'having a partner prevents solitude and affirms one's sexuality,' but also having a (heterosexual) partner means there is the potential for birthing children (2016: 107, see also 136).
Upon mention of this spirit, José Francisco became agitated and even jealous. 'Ah, Tomasa,' he said, sharing the *Conga*'s name. He continued, 'My *caballo* [Claudia] will need to pass her, but we will see if Tomasa will pass through my *caballo*.' When Odalis asked him why he said that he

replied, 'because my *caballo* is stubborn.' He angrily suggested that Claudia buy a doll for the *muerta*.

He went on, more calmly now, saying Claudia was going to the church of the Virgen de Regla, but she needed to go to the church of the Virgen de Caridad de Cobre also, 'the two waters go together.'[71] He announced he would help her make her way to *hacerse Santo* next year. It was not clear whether he meant financially or spiritually—most likely both. But he said he had conditions. He asked for a *cajón*. He grinned wide and said, 'I want to dance!'

Then he said, becoming serious again, that Claudia needed to attend to his identification—his doll. Dolls are extremely common in *Espiritismo Cruzado*. Sometimes dolls are kept at *bóvedas*, other times they can be on display in sitting rooms. José Francisco's doll was kept in the back patio next to a *prenda espiritual*.[72] This location was not a problem. He was displeased however, because his doll was not dressed nicely. Claudia had not dressed him as he wanted: with a red ceremonial hat or at the very least a bandana, and sack shorts. Instead his doll was essentially naked and fairly neglected.

José Francisco's posturing was like a rooster now; he cocked his neck forward and back and looking from side to side. He breathed heavily. With furrowed brows he said that 'My horse [Claudia] knows how I like to dress but she does not dress me like that! Until she makes me handsome, I will keep her ugly!" José Francisco said disdainfully, referring to her skinniness.

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[71] As mentioned previously, La Virgen de Regla, corresponds to Yemayá the oricha of the sea, and the La Virgen de Caridad de Cobre corresponds to Ochún who is affiliation with freshwater, especially rivers. These two *orichas* together are sometimes referred to as the 'two waters'.
[72] Again, similar to the composite objects of bones, metals, and sticks relevant to *Palo* practice, but *prendas espirituales* do not contain human bones.

Contextual characterisations of beauty exist relative to 'a crossroad of congested forces,' (Leeds Craig 2006:160). Cuban characterisations of beauty deemed being too skinny to be unfeminine and undesirable, and therefore ugly. Generally, wide hips with thick, ample thighs, softness and curves were favoured over slim, angularly shaped bodies. These beauty ideals relate back to the national valorisation of the *Mulata* and aestheticized racial identities (Edmonds 2010: 152). The previous example of the *Conga*'s slim, thin nose shows the importance of *mulatez* and having a proximity to Whiteness to demonstrate beauty. The emphasis on a voluptuous figure, conversely, shows the position of Blackness and its codings. That is, its importance for sexual attractiveness (ibid 135).

Calling attention to issues surrounding beauty and race is by no means limited to spaces of *Espiritismo Cruzado*. I am *not* arguing that spirits provide a realm for these discussions that are absent elsewhere. Quite the opposite actually. It is not that something is elucidated only through work with *muertos*. Rather what is evident is the pervasive way work with *muertos* and questions of race and gender are imbricated with each other in daily life. The case of Claudia and José Francisco demonstrates that spirits can be actively involved in shaping women's bodies and body images and potentially altering them. Spirits operate on different layers and levels in, on, and with the living and their bodies.

The conflict between Claudia and José Francisco involves a kind of failure to meet gender ideals in relation to Claudia's body. José Francisco claims that in order to communicate his desires (which Claudia is not otherwise fulfilling) he makes her skinny and thus ugly. This example, like the previous example regarding the Conga, relate to Claudia's body. Härkönen's work on kinship, gender, and the life cycle in Habana suggests that people feel entitled to talk about and engage women's bodies (2016:15). She writes, 'bodies—women's bodies in particular—are considered something that is constantly out in the open, visible' (2016:

18). Claudia as a woman wants to look a certain way but due to the conflict between her and José Francisco, she is unable to live up these particular beauty ideals.

The family had made earlier inquiries about Claudia's weight, with a focus on potential *muertos oscuros* (dark spirits) causing her thinness. She had begun to only eat at home to be sure that what she ate remained free of *brujería* (witchcraft). As outlined in the chapter's introductory vignette, Claudia's skinniness was not just a problem insofar as it marked her as unattractive in the Cuban context. It also reflected her wasted spiritual potential—which would not be wasted if she prioritised her spiritual development more highly and actively. The expectation for *espiritistas* is that in their relationships with and through *muertos*, they can work toward resolving such problems, whatever their source.

José Francisco saw his doll as ugly. He did not see himself represented in it. The doll here is a massively important actor that is implicated in spiritual, ontological effects and transformations between the living and the dead. As in other religious traditions in the matrix, here we see that 'people do not just work with, direct or manipulate *otherworldly forces*; they often become entwined with them as well as with their material markers' (Espirito Santo et al. 2013:195; my own emphasis). The doll is a physical identification of José Francisco. My interlocutors described dolls to me as identifications rather than representations in that for them identifications better illustrated the idea that one (in this case José Francisco) sees *himself* in the model represented. The idea of permeable energy but also the idea of recognition is relevant to such a labelling. The doll does not just represent José Francisco's vibrancy but acts as a site of engaging it as well (Espirito Santo 2015a:253).

Dolls

As Fanon argues, questions of identification are not affirmations of a given, a priori identity. Rather identifications as the production of images of 'identity,' are entirely capable of transforming the subject whose image it's assuming (1986 [1952]: xvi). This understanding of identifications relates to Taussig's (1993) position that in objects, like José Francisco's doll, representation and represented blur. Because the doll is not just a copy of José Francisco's former material body, what Taussig might call the 'original.' Instead the doll as a materialisation actively transforms both José Francisco and Claudia, acting as a conduit of spiritual energy (Espirito Santo 2015a:267). In this way, selves extend beyond one's material body (ibid 287).

José Francisco, Claudia, and the doll all remain in flux. José Francisco and Claudia depend on the extent to which the other manipulates (or is manipulated) via the doll. Responsibility is shared between the two. Yet still, the doll is a symbol and vehicle of both José Francisco's presence in Claudia's life and the world as such, and his relative personal, corporeal absence. The doll as a partial repetition of José Francisco highlights that his original materiality remains largely beyond access. Yet, in the way that José Francisco is entangled with Claudia, there is a corroboration that his spiritual energy may not be such an 'otherworldly force.' That is, the domains at which he operates are not separate from the domain of Claudia's physical appearance.

Here, the concept of 'intercorporeality' (Weiss 1999:5) might be useful. Weiss describes embodiment in this way to call attention to the way it is experienced. That is, as continuously mediated in interactions with others, here, both the living and dead alike. This intercorporeality is enacted in the doll's animation of both Claudia and José Francisco. The doll as a physical body orients José Francisco toward Claudia and Claudia

toward José Francisco. Again, the doll establishes José Francisco and his spiritual energy as both present and absent.

While *muertos* pre-exist their substances, in this case José Francisco pre-existing his identification via the doll, much of ritual technologies in *Espiritismo Cruzado* verify the body of the *espiritista* as the site wherein *muertos* are made, or 'come into being,' (Espirito Santo 2015b: 268). The doll as identification points to this process outside of the body, yet in dialogue with it. Despite the fact that my interlocutors characterise *Espiritismo Cruzado* as 'more spiritual' than the other practices of *la religión*, lines between the supposedly, strictly spiritual and material are highly insecure. The materiality of the doll articulates this. The doll's vibrancy comes from Claudia's attendance to it and in turn, José Francisco's actions demonstrate his and the doll's vitality and importance.

This manipulation or bringing into being can be considered a particular kind of active mimesis and 'ontological hybridity' (Espirito Santo 2015a:266, 287). Again, this hybridity is predicated on an understanding 'that necessarily encompasses object, human bodies, and spirits of the dead' (ibid). Characterisations (both ethnographic and academic) that relegate *Palo* to the material and *Espiritismo* (*Cruzado*) to the spiritual would effectively ignore the way that both practices creatively and generatively bind and transform people in relation to materials—sometimes as materials—or substances. In this case the doll, Claudia, and José Francisco. In José Francisco's articulation of discontent, he makes causal claims regarding his effects on Claudia's appearance, particularly her weight.

The way José Francisco and Claudia are symbiotically enmeshed with each other points to them as individual actors but also as being inextricable and interconnected with one another. Beauty becomes the way José Francisco's dissatisfaction is corporeally registered. While the *espiritista* and her abilities are made up of her *muertos*, José Francisco and Claudia

seem to share an aesthetic, intersubjective continuity between body, persons, and self. Eventually, as evidenced by the photo below, Claudia did fulfil the desires of José Francisco, making him beautiful in his own way (see figure 7). In doing so she began to smooth out the tensions I have outlined thus far. Since the time of this example she has developed to the point of being able to *hacerse santo* and now has *hecho de* Yemayá.

Figure 10: José Francisco's doll, after having been spruced up, sitting at the bóveda at the cajón later held as per his request

I have discussed spirit/practitioner relationships but also shed light on beauty norms such as weight and mixedness as an ideal. Historic processes coded Whiteness as lacking sensuality and Blackness as

hypersexual, with mixedness being a tempering force and superlative model. Features, in addition to skin colour, signal to these understandings as seen in having a 'White' nose. The state of Claudia's life and relationships are reflected in her weight (Härkönen 2016:18). In the Cuban context, being too thin indicates a problem of some kind (ibid)—spiritual, financial or both—that for women prevents the realisation of beauty ideals, like being *media gordita* (thick, full-figured). While this section points to the way there can be a playfulness to selfhood, certain racialised notions of beauty appear to be less open to dynamism. Below I continue with an examination of relationships that unsettle the notion that spirits uncomplicatedly comprise practitioners as selves, whilst paying attention to the primary concerns held by my interlocutors.

Gitanas and Hyper-heteromasculinity

This section continues in showing that as spiritual capacity is cultivated processually, so is the *espiritista*-as-self. This processual conceptualisation of identity, however, can sometimes be in tension with static or essentialised notions as well. Such tensions highlight frictions in straightforward *muerto/espiritista* narratives, exposing the at times delicate nature of negotiating spiritual paths and relationships with *muertos*. Just as the scenario above between Claudia and José Francisco detailed a disconnection, this section examines another instance of discord. Eduardo, Claudia's cousin, was also experiencing conflict in relation to his embodied experience of gender. I examine how Eduardo's relationship with his *muerta principal* illuminates the way religious identities are constructed in relation to gender and sexuality and how gender and sexuality norms impact spiritual trajectories.

The influence of gender and femininity in particular is apparent in Eduardo's example both in the relevant ritual technology (trance) and the category of spirit (*gitana*). I explore how Eduardo had anxieties about

passing his *gitana* as he feels she will make him unmanly and jeopardise his sexuality. His concerns included trance, as trance can femininize. Ideas of what men and women do, or at least what they are meant to do, typically correspond to heteronormative associations. I observed that men were particularly anxious about being perceived as homosexual (see also Härkönen 2016:38,141-142). While Claudia was displeased with how she looks, Eduardo was afraid of how he would act. Beyond trance as a methodology, due to the *gitana*'s hyperfeminine coding as detailed in chapter one, Eduardo felt his masculinity and sexuality would be especially endangered by her display of feminine affectations.

On another occasion months later, we sat at the *bóveda*. Eduardo was accompanying us. He was home that weekend from his military conscription working in the navy. Though at the time he was 19 going on 20, he looked much younger, closer to 14 or 15. He was sweet and good-natured. A young, fashionable *Mulatico*, he sometimes wore thick black glasses which he admitted had plastic lenses.

Eduardo explained to me that because he had *pelo lacio* (referring to non-textured hair) he was able to sport the latest hairstyles of Spanish or South American footballers: one month Messi, another month Ronaldo. Today he told me he had the same hair as Brazilian footballer, Neymar: shaved on the sides, frosted blonde and long in the middle. After Eduardo's conscription, he planned to go to university and study electronics. Eduardo was one of the few young men I knew who was actively developing as an *espiritista and* passed *muertos* in spheres of spiritual practice. I cannot speak to why Eduardo had accepted his *don* and engaged in *Espiritismo Cruzado* practice, but, as the son of Odalis and Ines' brother, he grew up in a family saturated with *la religión*.

Odalis had just passed her Francisco. Francisco had scolded Eduardo, saying he was not taking opportunities to develop: 'Do you not see yourself? You are not doing anything! You are just calm, tranquil.'

Francisco shook his head with lips pursed in disapproval and concluded his presentation.

On the heels of Francisco's *caridades*, as we were singing, Odalis paused and asked permission of the *misa.* She saw the spirit of a woman. She was wearing *una saya carmelita* (a brown skirt), Odalis told us she thought the *muerta* was a *gitana*. We began to sing to *gitanas*.

Cinco flores yo te dedico.	Five flowers I dedicate to you,
Cinco flores de humildad	Five flowers of humility
buscando que tú me brindes fe	looking for you to offer me faith,
esperanza y caridad.	hope and [works of your] charity.
Gitana, gitana mía.	Gypsy, my gypsy.
Gitana, gitana inmensa,	Gypsy, grand gypsy,
líbreme de inquietudes,	free me from anxieties,
líbreme de los lamentos.	free me from lamentations.
Bendíceme …	Bless me...

As mentioned in the previous chapter, in some cases, songs to a category of spirit are sung and the spirit's presentation follows. In other instances, the communication of a category of spirit may cause *espiritistas* to sing to them. That is, their presentation precedes their songs rather than determining them. Odalis continued on, completing this loop: the spirit initiating us to sing to *gitanas* and then our singing to *gitanas* instigating the spirit to communicate further. Odalis picked up that the *gitana's* hair was in a braid on one side, there was a flower behind her ear, and she was a *Mulatica clara, casi una Blanquita* (light-skinned *Mulata,* almost White). Eduardo giggled and said '*Luz.*' He asked Odalis to whom this spirit belonged. Odalis made a strange face at him and shrugged.

She said, 'If other people do not want this spirit, I will take her. I will take her *caridades*. She can bless me.' Spirits, of course, cannot be traded at the whims of the living. There was important subtext in this curious interaction. Eduardo was being flippant in asking Odalis to whom the *gitana* pertained. Based on the physical description, he knew the *gitana* was not only his spirit but his *muerta principal*. Odalis was being equally facetious in saying that if no one wanted the *gitana* she would take her.

Odalis knew that despite Eduardo having strong reservations, he needed to pass his *gitana* for the sake of his spiritual development. Shortly after this exchange between Eduardo and Odalis, Odalis fell into trance again. Her body circled, her arms bent at 90-degree angles and her hands made lose fists. This time it was Ta José who was making his presentation. Ta José came with such control that Odalis' body only gently slumped.

He knocked hitting the floor hard. José is a mature, quite spiritually developed *muerto*. This *caridad* was just the second of two presentations José made during my fieldwork. He leaned forward with exaggeration, slightly slouched, and sat with legs spread wide, forearms resting on knees. Ines inquired, 'How do you see things, noble being?' He said he was presenting here and that he also attended the most recently held *cajón* of our wider spiritual community. He enjoyed it very much, but he claimed he came forth today to break up the perturbation among the *espiritistas* here.

Ta José said he saw that people needed to move forward. He asked for *zunga* (Bantú-Kongo word for tobacco). Once he was handed it, José put the cigar fully in his mouth lengthwise and began to chew. During his presentation José carried out various cleansing using *aguardiente* and tobacco. He admonished Claudia and even María. José spoke for a long time addressing the spiritual tension in the house before directly focusing his attention to Eduardo. Ta José arose and cupped a handful of water from the *palangana* and threw the water square in Eduardo's face. Eduardo winced and retracted back.
Ta José scowled at him, 'And you? Get over your *complejo* [complex]. If you are going to be a *maricón* [derogatory word for a homosexual], you are going to be a *maricón*. If you are going to be man, you are going to be a man. But passing spirits does not make you a *maricón*.' Ta José talked about homosexuality and manhood as though they were mutually exclusive categories. He paused, shaking his head. Then José announced his departure. He sat back down in the chair once more, knees bent, and

legs spread wide and concluded his presentation. We were left with pools of water, *aguardiente*, and dried tobacco leaves strewn about.

Later, after José confronted Eduardo having a complex about passing his spirit, we sat, windows open, in the front room sharing a coffee as Claudia painted my nails. Odalis told him, 'You do not want to pass *muertos,* but I know the manliest of manly men who pass spirits! ¡*Un Negro fuerte y el otro es tremendo Mulatón*! [One is a strong, muscular Black man, and the other a tremendous, big *Mulato*] You hear me? You get it? You understand? I mean, do you think I like chewing up and eating tobacco?' she said this last bit spitting out tobacco left over in her teeth from the cigar Ta José had chewed. Odalis took a sip of coffee then handed me the cup.

'*Gitanas*?' Eduardo asked her.

'That I do not know,' Odalis admitted.

I asked Eduardo why he did not want to pass this *gitana*. He responded, 'It is not that I do not want to, it is just, it cannot happen.'

Odalis tried to convince him that it has nothing to do with being gay—this was a question of spirits. 'It has nothing to do with that, right Aly?'

Knowing that Cubans place men's sexuality under special scrutiny (see Allen 2011; Härkönen 2016), I nodded and shrugged, adding my opinion to Odalis' that it seemed to me this had much more to do with the mentality of the living rather anything to do with the *muertos*. Eduardo paused before responding. He looked at me and smiled, 'Aly, you are not helping me out here!'

While many *religioso* articulated a practice as feminine according to the applicable demographics of practitioners' gender, practically speaking I

observed that modes of ritual action also contributed to this characterisation. As laid out in the introduction, trance is generally considered to be a feminine mode of communication in that it mirrors acts of sex and pregnancy. As Rafael L. Ramírez suggests of the wider Caribbean context, 'The masculine and the feminine domains are defined by specific attributes, tasks and symbols. Subjects are recognized as male or female and are evaluated according to their compliance with gender expectations' (2004: xi). I observed these designations as applicable for the Cubans I know as well, often putting men into an awkward position regarding trance. Performing feminine coded actions or praxes can endanger a man's masculinity and thus his sexuality. Below I focus on the way active/passive sex roles play into (or do not play into) trance.

Active Versus Passive

Eduardo's reluctance above speaks directly to the understandings held by most of my interlocutors concerning men and women, masculinity and femininity, and sexuality. I suggest that the way Eduardo found himself manoeuvring the complexities of his *espiritista* practice indexes, among other things, the way the gendering of bodily experiences both maps onto and forms perceptions of masculinity and femininity (Griffith and Savage 2006: xix). Some literature that addresses Latin American gender begins with the notion of women as open and men as closed. This openness is what makes women—and homosexual men—supposedly 'better' *espiritistas,* as they are allegedly primed to be acted upon.

With respect to sexuality, men are designated as active penetrators and women as passive and penetrated (Beattie 1997:66). Gendering happens through sex-as-practice as norms and binaries assign gendered codings to sexual 'domination' and 'subordination' (Lancaster 1992:41). Following this, often only the penetrated partner in sex between men is designated as homosexual (ibid 79). Trance, sexuality, gender, and masculinity and femininity have a striking relationship. Strathern's convincing, classic

example of gardening and hunting, states the ethnographically contextualised notion that 'it is because women "do" things differently from men, because they evince different capacities in the way they act, that their bodies are gendered' (1988:130). That actions determine gender can often be inextricably linked to sexuality. As Peter Wade writes, 'gender roles and meanings attached to the categories of male and female are often closely linked to sexuality' (2009:9). Again, trance is a form of spiritual knowledge production that shares a likeness to the act of penetrative sex.

As presented in the introduction, Matory details that Yoruban verb '*gún'* meaning 'to mount' is only used to describe the riding of a horse or vehicle (recall the way *muertos* call their *espiritistas* horses), sexual mounting, and instances of trance possession (2005:211). In the language used to describe trance possession as a technology of spiritual communication— 'mounting and mounted'—the implications to sexuality are explicit (ibid). Most *religiosos* used spiritual and biocultural understandings of gendered bodies to explain the fact that more women practice *Espiritismo Cruzado* than men. Odalis, however, offered another explanation. She told me there were not as many men as women because men did not *want* to practice. Odalis explained to me, because there was an idea, related to the practice supposedly being a '*cosa de mujer*' (woman's thing) that, for men, *Espiritismo Cruzado* related to homosexuality.

Odalis said that even if some heterosexual men did have the *don*, many choose not to develop in *Espiritismo Cruzado* out of a fear of being mounted. Not developing despite having the *don* may be a manifestation of a fear or aversion to particular discursive religious identities conferred onto *religiosos*. This fear or aversion coincides with the abovementioned *'complejo'* (complex). Homosexual men's involvement in religious traditions such as *Santo* or *Espiritismo Cruzado* is common. *Espiritistas* explained to me homosexual men's involvement was because they did

not have a complex about passing spirits. A few of the notable men who have appeared in the thesis thus far (the guest at the *escuelita* in chapter four and the doctor hosting one of the *cajones* in chapter five [notably both *Mulatos* as well]) are openly homosexual.

While sexual roles of active and passive are considered to be in a mutually exclusive dialectic, the ethnography regarding trance throughout the thesis has drawn attention to the way that *Espiritismo Cruzado* practice disrupts this dialectic. Following hooks' argument from the introduction, that sex does not have to be coded into idioms of domination (2003:65), I suggest that gendered spiritual positionalities do not mimic taken for granted norms of active/passive. I argue against these demarcations which are rooted in the idea that being a recipient means one is solely acted upon. Passing *muertos* does not equate to passivity or weakness. Trance as a kind of 'embodiment [that] functions as a pathway to knowledge' (Alexander 2005:298) exemplifies its importance.

Moore writes: 'The material world that surrounds us is one in which we use our living bodies to give substance to the social distinctions and differences which underpin social relations, symbolic systems, forms of labour and quotidian intimacies' (1994:71). Indeed, through trance people are able to build relationships, get better senses of self, and *resolver*. As such, *espiritistas* and their penetrated bodies coincide with activity just as much, or perhaps even more than, passivity. Gendered qualities such as receptivity and openness allow for methodologies that setup specific mechanisms for communication and knowledge production and need not be associated with inaction. Openness indicates strength and capability. *Espiritistas* and *muertos* alike are active in processes of trance.

Nevertheless, gendered spiritual positionalities and identities are constructed through our experiences and mediated by material bodies (Mohammed 2004:39). The notion that penetration, spiritual or sexual,

indicates femininity is strong. The actions of an *espiritista* in spiritual practice are not in isolation from a practitioner's perceived identity. Men and perceptions of homosexuality especially relate to questions of mapping spiritual identity onto sexual identity. This association between a spiritually penetrated body and a sexually penetrated body is due to the way most of my interlocutors experienced gender as, in part scripts coded onto their bodies, and in part as 'a social practice that constantly refers to bodies and what bodies do, [. . .] not [gender as] a social practice reduced to the body' (Connell 2005 [1995]:71). Despite the importance of anatomic difference in determining gender for my interlocutors, ways of doing things reproduce gender categories and ideas in cogent manners for *espiritistas*. Eduardo demonstrates how the aforementioned scripts and associations can sometimes create strains and frictions for men.

Despite gender categories being precarious or in flux due to the gendered characterisation of bodily knowledge production, there simultaneously remains a bi-polarity to most relevant categories. Given local scripts that posit heteromasculine performance as the norm for men, and trance as feminising, it stood to reason that *Espiritismo Cruzado's* emphasis on trance caused Eduardo anxiety about his masculinity and sexuality. In fact, Odalis mentioned that Eduardo had raised such concerns to her on previous occasions. However, I learned from Eduardo that his resistance to fall into trance was rooted in his anxiety about specifically passing his *gitana*. Eduardo elaborated that he did not feel like the ritual technology of trance in and of itself would necessarily be what called his masculinity into question. Rather than discomfort stemming only from what being a channel for spirits implied about his sexuality and masculinity, Eduardo expressed apprehension regarding passing a *gitana* in particular. Being mounted by the spirit of a *ngangulero*, a Francisco or Ta José type, would have been acceptable for Eduardo, but his *gitana* was out of the question.

Categorising the penetrator in homosex as *not* homosexual and the penetrated as homosexual makes for a neat differentiation. However, practical realities reveal that these classifications are indeterminate. There is also the entrenched understanding that homosexuality can largely be identified in effeminate affect rather than sexual practice alone (Buffington 1997: 121). That is to say that those who do not perform effeminacy are not homosexual. For Eduardo, the problem was not so much falling into trance but doing so as the 'horse' of a highly feminised *gitana.* Recall from chapter one that the *gitana* can be folded onto the *Mulata*, perhaps with the former acting as an archetypical ideal of the latter.

As mentioned earlier, the *gitana/Mulata* is considered to be the epitome of femininity. Though passing a spirit like Ta José might appear more blatantly 'homosexual'—a man incorporating the spirit of a man as corresponding to men who have sex with men, Ta José is more in line with the (classed) and raced scripts of *hombría* that designate men's idealised attributes and responsibilities (Allen 2011:11) Eduardo's comfort with passing a *muerto* like Ta José signals that evident Blackness may mean a less precarious masculinity.[73] (See chapter seven for further conversation regarding masculinity, sexuality and Blackness.) Rather than the action of falling into trance as the problem, I observe Eduardo's concern as a kind of effeminophobia. Eduardo's worries about his sexuality were about not fulfilling contextual scripts of masculinity. These concerns surrounding femininity parallel a comment made by several Cubans I know, that it was fine if men were homosexual, so long as they were 'respectful' (meaning not flamboyant).

[73] For many Cuban *religiosos*, male homosexuality is often problematically associated with foreignness and Whiteness (Beliso-De Jesús 2013). As a *Mulato*, Eduardo has a greater proximity to Whiteness than Ta José as an enslaved Black African and experienced *palero.*

As such, Eduardo's primary worry was not his body being used in trance but with performing an exaggerated femininity commonly conflated with homosexuality. While I know homosexual men in Cuba who are highly effeminate, it seemed that rather than people basing this conflation on anything in particular, 'the homosexual' was more a character in some kind of heteromasculine allegory (Matory 2005[1994]: xi). Many men, though certainly not all, were homophobic and emphasised their masculinity either implicitly or explicitly against a straw man of an imagined homosexual. This figure of the imagined homosexuality as a comparison for heterosexual men demonstrates that masculinity is necessarily understood alongside (homo)sexuality.

Eduardo knew that when in trance with a *gitana* he would perform feminine behaviour and he focused on the looming threat of enacting femininity through voice, mannerisms or other characterisations. As people commonly conflated effeminacy with homosexuality, he worried his sexuality would be tainted by his *gitana*'s ostentatious display of femininity. The *gitana* is not only feminine, she is hyper-feminine, and performs a kind of femininity I did not see in other *muertas* and which was quite uncommon of my living interlocutors. While other women may fit into feminine ideals of being saucy or sexy, typically their feminine gender roles were characterised through independence, resilience, and practical savvy.

When Eduardo eventually did come to pass the *gitana* her voice was in fact high pitched and her affect feminine and exuberant. During most of her presentation her hands rested on her hips but with wrists inverted and palms facing out, a position that resulted in her chest protruding forward, causing her to embody the ideal feminine posture of '*tetas adelante, culo atrás'* (tits forward, ass back). She giggled coyly and shimmied often. His fears of enacting feminine affectations during the *gitana*'s presentation were founded after all, though the rest of us (all heterosexual women) did not register the stakes as highly as Eduardo

had. Once Eduardo was working with his *gitana* regularly, Odalis made a comment suggesting that the *gitana*, as feminine and a woman, existed apart from Eduardo as a man. Odalis' statement both separates the *muerta* from *espiritista* and re-establishes spirit as a person with her own subjectivity. The ontological reality of the spirit as separate and the spirit as part of the *espiritista* may appear to be in tension with one another. However, *Espiritismo Cruzado* necessitates that the 'subject' be regarded as multiple, not simply because the complexity of identity destabilises a unitary subject, but because it is quite practically made of up different selves with different subjectivities.

After Eduardo's military conscription he did indeed begin university. When I returned to Habana for visits and follow up trips, he was more self-assured and jovial. I cannot say definitively that his increased confidence is a result of his progression or working alongside his *gitana*, but these improvements certainly corresponded to it. There is an interplay of gender, sexuality, spiritual actors, and spiritual practice that is relevant to this scenario. This interplay elucidates clashes that complicate tidy narratives of *espiritistas* as a composite self of spirits (Espirito Santo 2015a). For Eduardo there are different, conflicting implications to materialising his *gitana*. On the one hand he had to accept the way in which she presented. On the other, thanks to work with her, he is able to continue developing spiritually and practically advance in his life.

Most works regarding African diaspora religiosity emphasise the fluidity and playfulness of practice to disrupt hegemonic notions of gender and sexuality (Matory 2005[1994]; Alexander 2005; Clark 2005; Méndez 2014; for exceptions see Beliso-De Jesús 2013). In the case of Eduardo and most men I met, these narratives of fluidity are complicated, but not irrelevant. By having to face trance as a necessary mode of communication with his *gitana*, Eduardo is oriented to himself as 'a gendered subject for whom society has devised specific roles and

expectations' (Lewis 2007:6). That is to say, trance makes Eduardo conscious of his masculinity and also its precarity (ibid 5). Eduardo's experience of *Espiritismo Cruzado* practice is one of negotiating complicated components of his identity and subjectivity.

These complicated frictions do not imply that *espiritistas* can be disentangled from their *muertos*. If anything, Eduardo's concern speaks to the way his experiences and constitution are pervaded by his spirits. They are not separate, as seen in Espirito Santo's (2015a:39) discussion of the paradox of inside and outside with regards to the *muerto* and *espiritista*. Spirits are both within and outside of one's body. Within because they exist in partially comprising one's character and emotions. Outside of the *espiritista* because *muertos* have the power and capacity to act, intervene, and affect changes in their *espiritistas*' lives.

Undoubtedly, and unsurprisingly, trance impacts men and women differently. Eduardo feared that passing his *gitana* would have implications regarding his sexuality and masculinity. As exemplified by Odalis, Ines and Claudia, women who pass spirits of men in my ethnographic experience had no such fears to mention.[74] As certain practices and particular components of those practices are especially gendered it offers both rich juxtaposition and highlights parallels as to how the personal and social experiences of the majority (women, who are the focus of most of this thesis), and the minority (men), unfold (Ortner 1996:124).

[74] Others (Allen 2011:11; Härkönen 2016: 141) have discussed a discursive disregard for sex between women. Allen in particular has suggested that this disregard relates to problematic notions of sex necessarily involving penetration. It is worth noting that regardless of the gender of spirit (women passing men and displaying masculinity; women passing women and gesturing to homosex) in the context of trance, as penetration is still happening, *espiritistas* are feminised in receiving *muertos*.

Conclusion

I have discussed that while people come into being through their *muertos*, these relationships do not always unfold without conflicts or tensions. The examples of Claudia and Eduardo point to moments of strain in *muerto/espiritista* dynamics shown through embodied spiritual experiences and relationships. The body—the meanings associated with it, and its use— is manipulated in religious practice in ways that illuminate imaginaries of race, beauty, gender, and sexuality. Sexuality, gender, race, and beauty are all simultaneously (rather than additively) articulated through religiosity. Claudia's tensions with José Francisco emphasises the dominant understanding in *Espiritismo* Cruzado practice that the body's materiality is open, providing for a multiplicity of tendencies and potentialities. However, the two of them emphasise this in a way that pushes back against the commonplace impression that this porosity of body and self is always patently clear, positive or beneficial. Through the doll, the fragmentation and integration that exists at the intersection of Claudia and José Francisco becomes all the more apparent.

The idea of the open body is part of Eduardo's very concern. Eduardo's trepidations map on to concepts and praxes of the spiritual, gendered social body relevant to *Espiritismo Cruzado* (Van Wolputte 2004: 254). His spiritual development is very different from those of women *espiritistas* who are supposedly naturally predisposed to *Espiritismo Cruzado*. Questions of gender, body, power and domination play out in Eduardo's reluctance to pass his *gitana*. His qualms about passing her speak to the way his spiritual trajectory might hinder or conflict with his desired display of masculinity.

Both examples of Claudia and Eduardo seek to put what is at stake for my interlocutors at the forefront of the thesis. There is a privileged relationship between practitioners and *muertos*, yet these relationships can also be in conflict. While generally relationships unfold with little

hassle (they help resolve disunity, rather than contributing to it), I have showed that these relations do not always play out smoothly. There are conflicts and anxieties that can get in the way. These conflicts demonstrate everyday concerns regarding beauty, gender, race, and sexuality whilst also complicating straightforward selfhood narratives.

Eduardo demonstrated that concerns about falling into trance may not simply be fear of the act itself, but also with the category of spirit. He articulated that a *ngangulero* would be a more favourable spirit to pass than his hyperfeminine *gitana*. Like the *gitana*, the hypermasculine Black *ngangulero* is a kind of racialised caricature in the Cuban imaginary. The following chapter elaborates on the interplay of sexuality, masculinity and race through experiences of passing spirits for (and of) *paleros*. In chapter seven I build upon the nuance added to the semiotic conventions of trance and sexuality from this chapter. In examining this ambiguity, I am also able to further elaborate on the complicated relationship between *Espiritismo Cruzado* and *Palo*, reinforcing the reoccurring motif of mixedness and ambiguity.

Chapter Seven: Blurred Boundaries

I arrived at an *escuelita* to see a few *espiritistas* standing in the street outside the house. There was an activity of *Ocha* going on inside, and those uninitiated remained outside. We waited for the others to finish up. After a little while, the next-door neighbour, who was finishing chatting to some other men, began to chat with us. We told him we were waiting for an activity, '*cosas religiosas, espirituales*,' (religious, spiritual things)—with 'spiritual' denoting *Espiritismo Cruzado*. He said he was a *religioso* but did not specify further. He began to say things to one of the *espiritistas* among us. He said that his spirits communicated to him that she was not happy at her job. He saw that she needed to get out of there because things were not on the up and up with the paperwork. People there, he said, are on top of you, they are not on your side. 'But you just stay quiet and stay out of the *chismes* (gossip),' he advised her. He spoke about her family saying that on her mother's side they were *espiritistas* and on both sides *santeros*.

He turned to me and said to me, 'Hey *linda*, I will just tell you two things. You have a bright light inside of you and you have a tremendous spiritual current.' Despite having said that he would only tell me two things, he went on inquiring 'Are you Cuban?' I told him no. 'No, no,' he repeated, as if to confirm and absorb my answer. 'There is trouble in your country, because you are not from here. I see you moving north.' He asked me who in my family had died. I told him both my grandfathers and mentioned a couple of great aunts and uncles. He told me that my grandmother also has a strong current, stronger than mine even. 'And, you have the spirit of an *Indio*,' he stated, 'with the same face as you,' (though he did not clarify if he meant the traditional category of *Indio* spirit or the Indian-from-India spirits those who knew me referenced). He continued, 'Your *gitana* will take you all over…' but he was cut off when we heard a shout from the window alerting us that we could enter the

house. Abruptly, the man said it was nice talking with us as if to end the conversation.

Innocently I asked, 'Are you not going to join us?'

'No, no *no estoy en eso* (I am not involved in that) (referring to *Espiritismo Cruzado*),' he replied and turned toward his door.

Introduction

Asad's (1993) crucial intervention to the anthropology of religion rightly called for a contextual shift to practice and action over abstract belief in examining religiosity. The applicability of this intervention has been presented at other points in the thesis; I found this complication of 'belief' to be especially relevant in discussions of *prueba* (proof). Yet a practice-centred understanding of religiosity still leaves some of my ethnographic encounters with an air of haziness. Why would a man who was sharing *caridades* from his *muertos* – what I perceived to be effectively practicing *Espiritismo Cruzado*— say he was not involved in it? The man's distancing, I suggest, is partially predicated on what it means to be involved in *Espiritismo Cruzado*. In the previous chapter I began to shed light on how the implications of involvement differ along gendered lines.

Here I build on the implications and associations and also elaborate on how other practices in the matrix are positioned in relation to *Espiritismo Cruzado*. I look at *Palo* in particular to interrogate how racialised, gendered codings appear to afford overlaps with *Espiritismo Cruzado* practice. I examine these overlaps through modes of communication that are gendered feminine. How are these modes conceived and how do practitioners interact with and manoeuvre them? Examining these questions demonstrates how *la religión* blurs the lines that it supposedly draws between practices, namely between *Espiritismo Cruzado* and *Palo* and the relevant, contextual identities associated with them.

I intimate there is a (racialised) queerness (Puar 2007) to the constant dialogue of gendering relevant to *la religión*. *Religiosos* make active delineations between practices. These demarcations draw attention to the power of practices to gender. Additionally, they highlight the significance of historically configured racial identities associated with religious traditions. Despite the importance invested in discrete boundaries, actors find themselves complexly entangled in the matrix in a way that challenges neat delineations.

Allen describes the utility of queer as an analytic, one that allows for the inclusion of a 'more capacious coarticulation of a number of embodied and embodying categories of normativity like nationality, gender, region, class, and ability, as well as sexuality' (2016:618). Other scholars have discussed some practices of African diaspora religiosity as having an openness that allows space for queerness (Alexander 2005; Clark 2005; Méndez 2014) and vice versa, the queer nature of these forms of religiosity producing further openness. In the ethnographic example below, I push back on these claims by suggesting there may be such an openness, however at times it can emerge through essentialised Black, hyper-heteromasculine associations. Because of this, I examine queerness as openness or mixing as being simultaneously fluid and at times reductive. In this way, queerness as an analytic discourse can mirror particular narratives of *ser criollo* (being creole, creole-ness, being Cuban, Cubanness).

In the previous chapter I discussed Eduardo and the way ideas of masculinity are jeopardised by work with (specific) *muertos*, especially via trance which is designated as expressly feminine. I suggest that the organisations of gender complementarity (Härkönen 2016) and sexuality in (typically) mutually exclusive dualisms plays into men's distancing themselves from what is deemed feminine. For example, this kind of distancing seems to be enacted through the *religioso* from the chapter's

introductory vignette. However, in this chapter I complicate this distancing. While practitioners like Eduardo have experiences akin to what Hammarén and Johansson frame as 'straight panic' or 'anxiety about how others perceive their sexuality' (2014:7) (and, in this context, by extension their masculinity), others who inhabit certain religious positionalities do not. I suggest religious positionalities are necessarily in dialogue with racialised and gendered imaginaries that span religious traditions, spiritual actors, practitioners, material bodies, technologies of communication, and coded affect. First, I re-examine the position of the *Congo* spirit, *Palo* as a religious tradition, and the imagined identity of the *palero* as contributing significantly to practitioners' experiences. Then, I consider the events of a specific *cajón* before concluding with a detailed conversation I had with a *palero* wherein together we unpacked the *cajón*'s events, specifically his father falling into trance.

Revisiting the *Congo* (*Palo* and *Palero*) in *La Religión*

As I have outlined previously, both *Palo* and the *palero*, or as some practitioners of *Palo* preferred to be called the *ngangulero,* hold a complicated and important position in Cuban cultural imaginings. Cultural imaginaries regarding *paleros* are in large part due to the legacies of Cuban anthropology and Fernando Ortiz's early work in particular which characterised religiosity and especially *Palo* practice as *brujería* (witchcraft), associating it with the Cuban 'underworld' (1986 [1906], 1986[1916]). Like in many other post plantation contexts of the Americas, through the brutality of the transatlantic slavery and its continuing legacy, Blackness became coded as lascivious, superstitious, and morally and intellectually inferior. Ortiz's early scholarship linked depravity, vice, and backwardness with Blackness and religiosity, and linked Blackness and *la religión* with each other. Unlike other culturally contextual classifications of typical 'witch' as a feminine subject, the Cuban engagement of 'witch' involves a masculinised Blackness (ibid;

Allen 2011:50). Abdul JanMohamed's notion of *racialised sexuality* (1992) is helpful here.

JanMohamed engages the unequal distributions of power that condense into stereotypes and symbols surrounding race and sexuality (102, 106). In this case, the stereotype and symbol of *Palo* (and subsequently *palero* and *Congo*) is dark, uncivilized, and wild (Cabrera 2000 [1954]). *Palo* is also highly gendered in its stereotypes; gendered stereotypes surrounding *Palo* as outlined in chapter two emphasise particular notions of masculinity. Wirtz writes the following of *Palo* stereotypes: 'the persona of the *palero*, [is] stereotypified as hypermasculine, aggressive, and dangerous' (2014:154). The image of an archetypical *palero* is a muscular, dark-skinned Black man, dressed in sack shorts with a ceremonial sash across his bare chest. This archetype remains and is reproduced both in actual lived experience (for male *paleros* practically it makes sense to be shirtless given heat, work with blood, dirt, etc.), but also in wider cultural imaginaries. As Halberstrom suggests 'excessive masculinity tends to focus on black bodies (male and female), latino/a bodies, or working class bodies' (1998:2). In the case of my interlocutors, the majority fulfil all three of these criteria.

However, Wirtz also argues that there are reasons *paleros* might embrace these stereotypes as well (2014: 154-155; cf. Beliso-De Jesús 2015: 193). This idea of practitioners themselves adopting stereotypes was certainly true of some of the *paleros* I know. Ocampo discusses how low-income men of Colour enact an amplified masculinity. This amplified masculinity provides an important form of capital, despite their lack of economic or racial privilege (2012:450; cf. Connell 2005[1995]:81). Similarly, Allen describes how his interlocutors unironically employ notions of Black superiority in sexual and physical prowess (2011: 172). The *paleros* I worked with often played up certain components of *Palo*, the use of human bones in particular, as indicative of its strength, which I address below.

Paleros frequently pointed to *Palo*'s no-frills spiritual/religious labour as they felt it demonstrated its 'rawness.' Further, the idea of Blackness as more associated with nature and authenticity was also taken up by interlocutors to index their enhanced spirituality. These can be read as ways of '(re)interpret[ing] racialised and sexualized interpellations of their identities in the current moment' (ibid 5). Despite not having cultural capital in the stricter sense (Bourdieu 1977), the *palero* holds a sort of a valorised position in the Cuban cultural imaginary due to *Palo*'s associations with *cimarrones* (maroons).

Like the *Mulata,* the *cimarrón* is an example of a racialised and gendered body used to create an emblematic national Cuban subject (Masiello 1997: 231). Some works suggest that *Palo* is a cultivated form of defiance rooted in the rebellion of enslaved peoples (Routon 2008), presenting *Palo* as a means to transgress power and revolt against fates that people seek to change (Ochoa 2010:260). The following Kikongo (Bantú language) proverb supports this— 'the white man's power lies in the whip, the black man's are in the spirit and the bush' (Diaz Fabelo 1974:33). The proverb gestures to the deeply complex relationship between race and religious practices. Here we see how the position of the *palero* is rooted in the supposed almost magical, Black abject power of their religiosity. As Beliso-De Jesús posits, *Congo* spirits are part of a 'long line of rebellious African Cuban slaves who continue to operate within romantic fields of longing, authenticity, and nostalgia' (2015:115).

Palmié posits that *Palo* finds its location in the matrix of *la religión* primarily in relation to *Santo* via a *Santo*/*Palo* binary (2002). The Kongo-Bantú component of *la religión* that is supposedly brutish and uncivilised sits opposite the more refined, almost regal Yoruban-Lucumí *Santo* (ibid). However, as chapter two relayed, *Palo* was related to me as a rich cosmology rooted in giving and receiving, balance with the forces of nature, and religious kinship just as much as *Santo*. These

characterisations were confirmed in my ethnographic experience**.** Further, I argue later in the chapter that *Palo* finds itself defined not exclusively in relation to *Santo* but other practices in the matrix, specifically in juxtaposition with *Espiritismo Cruzado*.

Beliso-De Jesús writes that *Congos* 'hail ethnic designations linked to colonial Africanness and different forms of blackness. Rather than just epistemological, these designations are also ontological; that is, they transform senses of being' (2015:3). Gilroy suggests that 'some of the most powerful components of what we experience as racial identity are regularly and frequently drawn from deeply held together gender identities, particularly ideas about sexuality' (1993:201). The *Congo/palero* speaks to this in that racialisation and gendering are co-constituted, each is involved in the production of the other as they are lived simultaneously. *Congo* spirits 'produce affective intensities that guide the emergence of black[ened] sexualities' (Belasco-De Jesús 2015:116-117).

Queer Hyper-heteromasculinity

Sedgwick offers a starting point for understanding the concept of 'queer,' as 'the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances, resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, or sexuality aren't made (or can't be made) to signify monolithically' (1993:8). Following this understanding, 'queerness' serves as a fitting analytic as constituent elements of gender and sexuality are often complexly in flux for practitioners through their relationships and communications with *muertos*. However, I am not thinking with queer as an ethnographic identity, but rather as a critical point of engagement to address the simultaneous transgressive and normative nature of experiences in this chapter as sexual and gendered norms are creatively in flux (Weiss 2016). I follow those such as Nadia Ellis in recognising how queerness as non-normativity draws attention to

the ‘structural queerness of black modes of [. . .] belonging over particular sexual or erotic practices’ (2015: 5). At the same time, it is not my intention to have this conversation ‘lose sight of same-sex desiring communities altogether’ (Gil 2018: 207-208).

Yet, because I do address what may be understood as queer sensibilities—playful expressions of gender and sexualities that sometimes put popular imagination and gendered expectations of particular bodies into tension with their performance (see Nixon 2017:104), I find an exploration of queerness as rhetoric—as well as the limitations of this rhetoric—useful in understanding this chapter’s ethnography.
Several others have discussed the limitations of queerness as a discourse, particularly regarding diverse positionalities such as age, nationality, class, race, religiosity, gender identity, sexual desire, and embodied presentation. Valentine outlines how cultural, class-based, and racial experiences of inequality are in conversation age, embodiment, and sexual desires, preventing ‘transgender’ (as an institutionalised category) from being a useful self-identifier for some of his New York City interlocutors (2007). Puar (2007) has discussed how the U.S. has used a kind of ‘homonationalism’ of sexual diversity discourse to further other religious and racial minorities especially with regards to anti-immigration rhetoric, xenophobia and Islamophobia. This othering is reinforced by Orientalist essentialisations of sexual repression that are contrasted with the U.S.’s supposed benevolent tolerance.

Duggan’s exploration of ‘homonormativity’ shows that such discourses that permit certain racialized and classed (White and wealthy) homosexuals within normative institutions (i.e the neoliberal free market economy) do not actually undermine heteronormativity. ‘Rather they uphold[s] and sustain[s] [it] while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption.’ As equality is limited to

particularly socially sanctioned institutions, privacy 'becomes domestic confinement' and 'neoliberal privatization of affective as well as economic and public life' is cemented (2002:190).[75]

For the above reasons the relationship and parallels between creoleness and queerness differ from the erotic as conceptualised in this thesis. Queerness and creoleness speak to the capacities of these ethnographic examples for ambiguity, subversions and challenges to boundaries in a way that is similar to Lordean erotics. However, queer/creole rhetoric can also solidify norms and invisiblise difference, excluding those outwith a subjectively defined 'queer' or 'creole' ethos. I take up practitioners' relationships to their religiosity through configurations of *Palo.* The configurations of *Palo* in the wider imagination carry particular associations that 'hail racial codas' (ibid 4), codas that specifically utilise Black masculinity as a source of strength. I will discuss how *Palo* subjectivities in different combinations of practice, practitioner, and/or *muerto*, seemingly shift gender norms. As such, experientially there can be an opening up of creative possibilities. At the same time, these potentialities are harnessed through the Black hyper-heteromasculinity of *Palo* which acts as a sort of inoculation against the 'contaminating femininity' (Beliso-De Jesús 2015) of practices like *Espiritismo Cruzado*.

I walked toward a *cajón* nearby my house in *Centro Habana* in the earlier months of my fieldwork. I often made it a point to arrive earlier than necessary in order to help out with arranging the space. When I got there, we moved furniture out of the way and shifted items off tables, adorning the *bóveda* more elaborately with photos, flowers, and dolls. After, Virginia, the *religiosa* (*palera* and *espiritista*) hosting the *cajón* had me in

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[75] **Importantly, anthropologists such as Gil (2018) and Allen (2016) (see also other scholars such as Muñoz [1999]) are deliberately trying to work against these limitations of 'queer' as an exclusionary or normative category and engage lived experience through black queer diaspora or queer of color studies.**

the kitchen peeling garlic for the soup she planned to serve post-*cajón*. A group of women were there with me and we chatted with stinging fingers. Then Virginia tasked me with bringing a bottle of rum and some cups to the *cajoneros* (drummers).

On this rare occasion the *cajoneros* had somehow arrived not only on time, but uncharacteristically early. As discussed in chapter five, I observed *cajoneros*, like *tamboleros*, as exclusively men.[76] Drummers enjoy a hypermasculine status akin to but of course ritually different than that of *babalawos* (as paternal, providers etc.). This status is due to drumming being a relatively high and consistent source of income and its exclusion of women. We were still a sparse few, so while we waited for more *espiritistas* to arrive, I took the opportunity to make small talk. The drummers and I talked about many things regarding who can and cannot drum, when, for what, with what drums etc. A few of them could only play for the *muertos*, but one was also a *tambolero*, playing the *batá* drums in *Ocha tambores* (drumming activities).

I asked if they considered themselves to be *espiritistas*. 'No, no. Drummers are drummers and *espiritistas* are *espiritistas*.'

'The spirits do not influence the songs you decide to play?' I queried. One responded, 'Sometimes you get a feeling or something, of what song to play, sure.'

Another added, 'I will tell you that yes, I have *vista*. I see things in my mind like a movie. Sometimes I see physical apparitions, but I am not an *espiritista*. I am a drummer.'

[76] There are women who are *tamboleros* in folkloric performance, however the debate concerning women's drumming either ritually or in terms of performance is beyond the scope of this discussion (see Hagerdorn 2001).

I nodded processing their words and what seemed to be efforts to distance themselves from *Espiritismo Cruzado*. During our conversation others had come and soon the drummers began to play. I noticed Arlo and Sandor arrive, two *paleros* with whom I was working, and a father and son respectively. Both are dark-skinned Black. They look similar as father and sons go, apart from the juxtaposition between Arlo's short greying hair at a number two fade and Sandor's long, waist length dreads. They found their way to me in the corner of the room and greeted me.

We began dancing. Or rather, I began to dance, and Arlo and Sandor swayed without picking up their feet. Arlo's pipe billowed such thick smoke that you could taste his tobacco just from dancing near him. After a few songs, Virginia began to shake and fell into trance with her Francisca. We sang and danced more as Francisca went around advising people and taking aggressive, long gulps of *aguardiente.* Francisca shouted at the *cajoneros,* instructing them on which songs she wanted to hear. She puffed emphatically on a cigar and spat several mouthfuls of *aguardiente,* showering the crowd. She danced with legs wide but did not move from her stance. Instead she bobbed her head from side to side, backward and forward, and shook her arms with elbows bent upwards in an L shape. 'I am Francisca *Siete Sayas*[77]*!*' she bellowed. Whilst Francisca was making her presentation, Arlo lost his balance and became unsteady. He demonstrated all the signs of falling into trance, but it seemed that after a moment the spirit had left.

I was surprised; previously Arlo had told me that he was a *palero* and *santero* but did not mention being involved in any other aspects of *la religión.* At the time, I could understand why Arlo would not frame himself as an *espiritista* due to the feminising associations many held in

[77] *Siete Sayas* (Seven Skirts); *Siete*, the number seven is the number associated with Yemayá/Madre Agua and as a result Francisca.

relation with such an identity, but still, in the moment, I saw what I perceived to be all the proceedings of an *espiritista* falling into trance. It looked to me as though he was going to vomit as he passed into the open-air hallway. I stayed dancing for the rest of the song but after I went to check and see if Arlo was feeling ok. I found him sitting in front of the fan—unsurprising in the heat and quite typical for those who have just fallen out of trance. I leaned on the table where he, Sandor, and a few others were sat and asked how he was.

'No,' Sandor told me, 'it is the *muerto.*' Sandor then stood, offering me his chair.

I sat as the *muerto* greeted and offered advice to those at the table. He took my hand and greeted me as well. 'What is your name?'

'Aly,' I told him.

The *muerto* looked to Sandor as though he did not understand. Sandor repeated, 'Aly.' The *muerto*'s face remained scrunched. Sandor offered my full name instead of the shortened version most interlocutors knew me by, 'Alysha,' mispronouncing my name with an 'sh.'

'And yours?' I gently asked.

He looked at me wide-eyed. 'Buru!' the spirit declared as he forcefully slapped his hand to his chest. Indicating he was a *Congo* spirit, Buru spoke *bozal* Spanish—again, one that can be difficult to understand for those unused to it. One of *bozal*'s biggest obstacles is that it often does not conjugate verbs. The syllables connected but each one's emphasis made words sound disjointed. The incorrect grammar was evident, but the meanings were more or less intelligible, though his voice sounded like he had a mouth full of marbles.

Buru told me, speaking softly, '*Entonica tú trabajias con mi caballo*,' (So, you work with my horse) he understood that Arlo was helping me. 'But you need to make a compromise and give some of your spirituality if you are in this—if you are in *la religión.* Remember us *Negros*.[78] Share this with your religion.'

Sandor passed me a *jícara* filled with *chamba*. *Chamba* is a ritual drink I observed only in *Palo* practice. Its base is *aguardiente*, though it is purported to also contain ground bones, sawdust, (Ochoa 2010:93) and all manner of chilis and peppers which gives it its red colour. One *palero* told me it contained over 100 chilis. *Paleros* explained to me that *chamba* was 'even stronger' than *aguardiente*, not only in its alcohol content (supposedly around 90% as opposed to 60%) but also because it was considered very spicy for the average Cuban palate.[79] After drinking it, I passed the *jícara* to Buru, but he did not receive it. I was surprised that he refused *chamba,* but he said clearly, '*Eso no'* (Not that).

After some time, Arlo fell out of trance. When he came to, he was looking for his glasses. Sandor had held on to them for safe keeping. Without speaking, Sandor handed the glasses back to his father. Arlo replaced Buru's cigar for his own pipe, lit it, and the two returned to their original spots in the corner. I was left wondering: when and why is working with particular *muertos* a problem for particular *religiosos*?

As the previous chapter addressed, gendering happens through both actions and affect. Taking stock of this, and with the knowledge that

[78] Literally translated as 'Black people,' but in this case, I understood Buru to mean *muertos*, referring in particular to the *Congos/Africanos* category of spirit.

[79] *Paleros* were very amused that I could drink *chamba* without any kind of reaction as most found it very spicy and teared up or coughed when ingesting it. They often said things like, '¡*Esta india sí es fuerte!*' (This India is strong!). The comment was made that this capacity to withstand was an interesting strength that contrasted my 'light' spirituality.

trance and *Espiritismo Cruzado* are both usually said to have feminising effects on the practitioner's perceived sexuality, Eduardo from chapter six experienced the conditions under which he fell into trance with his *gitana* as a potentially feminising. Elsewhere I have mentioned that I typically observed gendering as linked to anatomy— that is, biological ideas of sex conflated with gender. Additionally, I have discussed the way religious traditions are gendered and how their gendered positions impact practitioners. This process of gendering is highly linked to the racial codings of relevant actors: both practitioner and *muerto*.

Arlo is a man, he identifies as one and, in relation to the common conflation between anatomy and gender, he is easily recognised as such. Further, Arlo falls into clear codings of Blackness in the race/colour imaginaries of Cuban context, which include associations of hypermasculinity. Arlo's phenotypical and religious Blackness indexes strength and masculinity. Eduardo from the previous chapter, on the other hand, as a *Mulato*, had a greater proximity to Whiteness which is viewed as weaker (Härkönen 2016: 119). 'Virility, sexual power, and sexual aggression' are all highly racialised (Allen 2012: 49) and come together in conceptions surrounding *Palo*. Both Buru and Arlo are *paleros* and, as I have discussed above, as a result hold racialised and gendered positions both in the matrix of *la religión* and the wider Cuban popular imaginary. With respect to Buru, it is also important to emphasise the most important factor of *muertos*' identities: they are dead. Spirits' authority and knowledge is rooted in their deadness and being dead means they have more of everything they did when they were alive. In this case, Buru is coded with more knowledge, more spirituality, more Blackness, and more masculinity.

Alongside this however, Arlo falls into trance. A man falling into trance with the spirit of another man might parallel homosex, but the thesis has established the importance of measuring the *muerto*'s affect alongside the literal action of passing a spirit. Further, Archetti writes about how

‘different images and behaviours contained in the notion of masculine are not always coherent and they may be competing, contradictory and mutually undermining’ (1997:200). Allen specifies, ‘While as a rule, figurative and literal penetrability is a threat to Latin virility [. . .] the privileges of heterosexuality, and even “macho” status may also be extended to the penetrated. The male body is allowed a fair amount of mixing and ambiguity, as long as the body performs the masculine script competently’ (2011: 128).

Yet, Buru did not demonstrate overt performances of ‘appropriate’ masculinity. On the contrary, his actions were fairly moderate. Rather than being feminised by falling into trance, though, I intimate that Arlo passing Buru still seems to realise the norms of the hypermasculinised Black imaginary. This fulfilment is despite such imaginaries of masculine performance not being confirmed through Buru’s actual presentation. Here while norms regarding gender and sexuality are undermined, reductive racial constructs are affirmed; boundaries are crossed while categories are cemented.

Compared to other ostentatious displays of masculinity—Virginia passing her Francisca above serves as one example— Buru was quite measured. He remained seated and conversed quietly and calmly. He even refused *chamba*, the most strongly masculine coded substance (apart from blood and bone). Buru did no practical work to obviously demonstrate masculine affect, yet both Arlo and Buru’s identity is so strong in the Cuban cultural imaginary, a lack of exaggerated masculinity did not appear to matter. Such an experience points to the intricacies of how some men have to do practical work to fall on the appropriate side of the gender binary (masculinity), while others ultimately, based on the cultural imaginaries of Black masculine aesthetics are discursively read to do so regardless.

These imaginings of Black men and masculinity can be read as a kind of a Black masculine aesthetic with Lancaster's use of the word. Lancaster takes the term 'aesthetic' 'in its original and broadest sense: a perception of reality (1997:22). The Black hypermasculinity that dark-skinned *paleros* supposedly possess seemed to act as an armour against the feminising power of *Espiritismo Cruzado*. Racial and gender identity here offer porosity, sanctioning flexibility in apparently clear cut codings but also at the same time problematically reinforce reductive conceptions of sexuality, gender, and race.

Even the case of Virginia passing her Francisca points to both productive opportunities of queerness and mixing, but also potential essentialising. Francisca, though a woman, is masculinised in mounting Virginia, who is feminised in receiving her. (Again, this masculinisation is in reference to *muertos* mounting *espiritistas* as mimicking penetrative sex). In some ways these opportunities are indicative of *la religión* contributing to 'upending or destabilising dominant arrangements of bodies' (Méndez 2014: 103). However, these opportunities also do (and actually at the same time) the opposite.

Francisca demonstrates a more evident masculine performance than Buru's. Yet, while there is a crossing of boundaries, as 'gender is performed and accomplished (Francisca performing and accomplishing masculinity) it serves to naturalize and essentialize differences that are neither natural nor essential between men and women' (West and Zimmerman 1997 as quoted in Ocampo 2012:451), and masculine and feminine. Rather than interrogating whether or not practitioners are definitively upholding or contesting gender norms in terms of an either/or dynamic, however, I intimate that norms themselves are shifting and contingent. The exchange between Francisca and Virginia occurs across the boundaries of life and death. The traversing of this boundary allows for the instability of other categories such as gender or sexuality. The typical gender norms for men are reshaped as well, though with

respect to *paleros* and *Congos*, gender norms appeared to be re-moulded according to the contours of race.

In addition to Arlo's phenotypic presentation, he is a gifted *palero*. Being a *palero* entails a racialised masculinising both through the religious tradition's position in *la religión* and the emblematic status of his *Congo*. Alongside Arlo, Buru's identities (*muerto*, Black, man, *palero* during life) carry a conceptual weight. This weight does not change the coding of *Espiritismo Cruzado* as feminine, however it does offer *paleros* the prospect of engaging with it. There is space for dominant ideals regarding sexuality or gender scripts to be comfortably at odds with lived experience: men passing spirits of men without stigma. However, in the case of Arlo, I noted a racial essentialising happening alongside these queer possibilities.

While new or more dynamic calibrations of gender and sexuality can be at play, at times, racial and religious (and class) hierarchies and distinctions are reinforced (Allen 2012; cf. Puar 2005; cf. Valentine 2007). My framing of examples such as these as queer, is not intended as some kind of sloppy shorthand (Allen 2016:619), instead it addresses the simultaneous co-articulations of rigidity alongside the pushing past of normative assumptions. In this way, common narratives of queer are extremely similar to those of *criollo* (creole). Both are about fluidity, mixing and ambiguity; yet both can emphasise distinctions, boundaries, and exclusion. For these reasons *religiosos* need not 'identify as queer for queerness to be a useful, disruptive, and prospectively capacious hermeneutic' (ibid; cf. Puar 2005).

Although ultimately claims that Arlo's masculine identity remained entirely untarnished are beyond the scope of the thesis, Arlo did not demonstrate any of the anxieties or complexes of practitioners like Eduardo. Sexuality or masculinity were never related as points of concern, neither before nor after Arlo passed his *Congo*. When talking about what

happened later, it was clear the conversation was only for my benefit. Whilst using Arlo's material body, Buru did not perform blatant hypermasculine affect as seen by other *muertos* (and *muertas).* In the case of Arlo, factors that are in opposition to masculine codings (lack of masculine performance, falling into trance) are reconciled in and through racial and religious/ spiritual identities. Arlo as a gifted *palero*, is further masculinised not only through *Palo*'s position in *la religión* but also the emblematic status of Buru as a *Congo*. It was explained to me that falling into trance was not a problem for Arlo because it 'pertains to *Palo*'.

The masculine codings of *Palo* sanction trance as a methodology. I suggest that the unspoken permission *Palo* grants is due to essentialised notions of Blackness that are associated with *Palo.* This Blackness affords prospects for undermining other norms regarding gender and religiosity. However, this idea of pertaining to *Palo* begs the question: where does *Palo* practice end and *Espiritismo Cruzado* begin? The complicated interface between *Espiritismo Cruzado* and *Palo* is something I expand upon below. I suggest the 'queer' possibility for Arlo passing his *Congo* necessarily occurs against the backdrop of loosely drawn lines between *Espiritismo Cruzado* and *Palo*. Despite people articulating separations between *Espiritismo Cruzado* and *Palo*, both of which I fully recognise as religious traditions in their own right, the flexibility and fusion of the practices is also apparent. The simultaneity of problematising and limiting is not necessarily a deficiency of queerness or of *criollo*-ness, it is that typical queer discourses and *criollo* ones alike can often reinforce

simple dichotomies[80] (Cohen 1997) rather than interrupting them and providing space for the contingent, 'vexed multiplicities' (Allen 2012:224) of lived reality.

Blurring *Espiritismo Cruzado* and *Palo*

Previously I outlined how different ways of being and engaging are opened up in ways that fortify stereotypic imaginaries of Black masculinity associated with *Palo*. Now I introduce how such imaginaries are juxtaposed against feminine codings of *Espiritismo Cruzado*. In doing this, I further examine how the lines between *Palo* and *Espiritismo Cruzado* are both drawn and collapsed. In exploring connections and disjunctions between the two religious traditions, creolisation once again comes to the fore. Again, particular to the Caribbean, there is a 'malleability and mutability of various beliefs and practices as they adapt to new understandings of class, race, gender, power, labor, and sexuality' (Fernández Olmos and Paravisini-Gerbert 2011:4). However, as Beliso-De Jesús warns, 'we must be cautious not to presuppose [that this elasticity or plasticity is] always oppositional, subversive, or counterhegemonic' (30). While boundaries are transgressed, they are at the same time reinforced.

A few days after the *cajón*, Sandor paid a visit to my house. I had the opportunity to talk to him about Arlo falling into trance with his *muerto*.

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[80] Jasbir Puar has suggested that it would be fruitful to relate to queerness as an assemblage, 'in favor of spatial, temporal, and corporeal convergences, implosions, and rearrangements' (2005: 121). She goes on to say that assemblages would be a better way of framing queerness because they are more attuned to the interwoven forces that merge and dissipate, acting against notions of coherency and permanency' (ibid 128). And as mentioned in footnote number ???, emerging from radical Black and Third World feminism, Jafari Allen (2012) has offered 'black/queer/diaspora work for examining the nuances of lived experience. This framework is an attempt to hold academics (and practitioners, and artists) accountable *a la* Lorde's query/call to arms: 'Are you doing your work?'

As we sipped coffee and he smoked a cigarette, I explained to him that I was a bit puzzled. I told Sandor I did not know Arlo was an *espiritista*. Sandor told me his father was not an *espiritista*, though he worked with *muertos*. I asked, 'Why do some *nganguleros* [knowing he preferred this term to *'palero']* say they are *espiritistas* and others do not?' I still wanted to understand. 'I mean, if *Palo* involves such heavy work with *muertos*,' I clarified.

At first, Sandor did not know how to respond, which was fair enough. He paused, grabbed a handkerchief from his back pocket, and wiped sweat from his forehead. He said, 'You could delineate between working with *muertos* and *Espiritismo Cruzado,* but things are so linked in Cuban culture that it is not worth it to demarcate a clear and simple line between the two.' This explanation may seem like a contradictory statement, but it shows how the lines between practices are blurred and at the same, how delineating between them is also something people did purposefully and with care and attention.
By focusing on how the practices are blurred, practitioners like Sandor are able to conveniently overlook, or at the very least side-step, the ways religious traditions are gendered and racially coded. He went on, telling me he could only speak for himself. 'Well, for me, I am a *ngangulero* only and not *espiritista*. My thing is working with my *fundamento*, not with a *bóveda*.'

As detailed in chapter two, during routine work with *muertos* (in activities like an *escuelita*) *Espiritismo Cruzado* practitioners sit around a *bóveda* (spiritual altar)*. Palo* practice, on the other hand, is centred around the *nganga*, *prenda*, or *fundamento*. As detailed earlier in the thesis, these are cauldron-like composite objects comprised of human and animal bones, chains and metal, dirt, and sticks, among other things. Sandor's comment of *bóveda* versus *fundamento,* cites ritual objects as a means of reinforcing boundaries between *Palo* and *Espiritismo Cruzado*, enabling him to distance himself from *Espiritismo Cruzado.* In this distancing,

Sandor ends up producing the differences he claims to merely describe (cf. Valentine 2007:18).

Sandor continued, 'Look, for me, working with my *fundamento* is faster and more effective. That is for me,' he repeated. Sandor's statements brought to mind conversations with other *paleros*. Most practitioners I know echoed this narrative of 'efficacy.' Efficacy, coded as masculine, was related to the *fundamento*. When work with *muertos* occurs in relation to the *nganga*, it becomes recognised as a kind of masculinised labour.

As I mentioned in chapter two, one practitioner told me that '80% of *Palo* is *Espiritismo [Cruzado]*.' He explained, actually countering Sandor's framework of the *fundamento* being more effective, 'When you have a strong relationship with your *muerto principal*, you do not need to use *chamolongos*[81] or even the *nganga* as much when consulting [for yourself]. Direct communication with *muertos* is much faster than *chamolongos*, because with *chamolongos* you can only ask yes or no questions.' I asked the *religioso*, given all that, why he called himself a '*santero* and *palero*' and not an '*espiritista, santero* and *palero'* like many of my other interlocutors (notably, women). He did not have a ready answer either but thought a moment before telling me it was because being an *espiritista*, for him, was already implied in *Palo*—the two are essentially working with *muertos*— so there was no point in stating both.

I do not necessarily dispute the reasoning the above *religioso* offered, but it is compelling to posit it alongside questions of boundaries and gendered associations. Despite my initial reaction of surprise, I am equally not attempting to nullify the claim that Arlo is a *ngangulero* and not an *espiritista*. The way Arlo self-identifies is not necessarily my concern here. Instead I am pointing to the fluidity that is present in practice despite the distinctions *religiosos* make between religious

[81] Shells or coconut discs used for divination.

traditions and certain technologies of communication or ritual objects within them. I note how overlaps alongside efforts to emphasise stark division relate to gender and racial codings and how these incongruities occur within wider systems of power and signification. Such indeterminacy paired with concretised differentiations is reflective of queerness, creole-ness and Cubanness, and *la religión*.

Sandor's investment in the *nganga* setting *Palo* apart from *Espiritismo Cruzado* warrants unpacking. *Espiritismo Cruzado* practice can sometimes include important ritual objects called *prenda espirituales,* also referred to as *fundamentos espirituales*. *Congos* ask/tell their *caballos* to construct *prendas espirituales*. Some *prendas espirituales* will involve animal sacrifice (and within that some will include both *animales de cuatro pata* [four legged animals, typically goats] and *animales de pluma* [feathered animals such as chickens], while others only call for the latter). Other times *prendas espirituales* never involve animal sacrifice.

Prendas espirituales appear as practically the same as their supposedly more 'authentic' *Palo* counterparts, apart from one crucial distinction: the inclusion of human bones. This, to me, is effectively the only difference, but one both *paleros and espiritistas* are very invested in underlining. And relatedly, both *paleros* and *espiritistas* alike stress that *prendas espirituales* do not involve a blood pact[82] or the *nfumbe* category of spirit. Indeed, Sandor mentioned the blood pact relevant to *Palo* a couple of times in our conversation that day: 'The important thing is the blood pact between a person and their *muerto*, that is absent in *Espiritismo [Cruzado]*, it is unique to *Palo*.'

That both religious traditions include *prendas (prendas espirituales* for *Espiritismo Cruzado* and *prendas materiales* for *Palo)* brings them

[82] Interestingly, because the blood pact is part of *rayamientos* (*Palo* initiation) it seems that another binary from chapter three, gift/initiation, resurfaces.

together as similar enough so that work from *Palo* spilling over into *Espiritismo Cruzado* can, under certain conditions, be acceptable. Yet, evidenced in the distinction of spiritual/material (read feminine/masculine) they are kept apart. Human blood and bones keep them separate enough to maintain *Palo*'s racialised, gendered coding as Blacker and masculine and *Espiritismo Cruzado*'s codings as lighter and feminine. These examples show fluidity but demonstrate difference as well. While both *Espiritismo Cruzado* and *Palo* could reasonably be identified as '*cultos de muertos*' (cults of the dead) (Arguelles 2001: 8), above Sandor highlights the blood pact as the distinguishing factor between *Palo* and *Espiritismo Cruzado.* This distinction again calls back to the characterisation of blood (*Palo*) versus water (*Espiritismo Cruzado*). To reiterate, the idea of *Palo* as '*más fuerte*' (stronger) than *Espiritismo Cruzado* indexes the gender associations each practice holds. While the technologies to engage spiritual or religious work sometimes differ and still only sometimes, if the premise of work with spirits of the dead is applicable to both, the idea of *Palo* as stronger was one of the most relevant differentiations among my interlocutors.

It is not surprising that practitioners emphasise blood as it plays a crucial role in *Palo* initiation and subsequently practice. Yet, while a blood pact per say is unique to *Palo*, the role of blood writ large does not necessarily appear to be more pronounced in *Palo* than it is in other practices. *Ocha* and *Ifá*, for example often require animal sacrifices. Nevertheless, conflating *Palo* with blood reinforces how the practice has been portrayed as the, importantly hyper-racialised, 'dark side of *Ocha*,' (Palmié 2002: 167-76), something 'uncivilised' with *energía baja* ('low energy'). *Palo* is often characterised as 'brutish', 'savage', and 'natural,' words that overtly imply racialisation. Alongside the practice's description as the 'dark side' of *la religión* is a gendering that follows scripts of Black abject (spiritual) power and heteromasculinity (Beliso-De Jesús 2014:515).

I brought up another example. 'And the *cajón*? I am not sure if I understand, it seems to me that working with *muertos* in *Espiritismo Cruzado*, is not so different—of course like you said apart from the *bóveda* and *fundamento*—but *nganguleros* attend *cajones.'*

Sandor wore a smile. He said he could tell I was not totally satisfied with his answers. 'No, *chica*, no. You have to understand, a *cajón* is not strictly speaking unique to *Espiritismo [Cruzado]*. The one we attended was a *cajón* in the fashion of *Espiritismo [Cruzado].'* He continued on*:*

> Before[83], a *cajón* was really only done as an activity for *Palo*, in the *cuarto de fundamento*. Now they are more frequently done in front of one's *bóveda,* as you have seen many times. The fact is that they are very often the same *muertos*. The same Francisco who is your *muerto principal*, who you work with at your *bóveda*, can be the *Congo* who rules your *nganga*. *Cajones* inside the *cuarto de fundamento* still exist, but they are of course closed to those not initiated, they are more complicated, **'***más fuerte'* (stronger). Not only are those uninitiated not allowed but the hierarchies within initiation are important, only the ritual elders can participate.

That there are *cajones* held in both *Espiritismo Cruzado* and *Palo* brings them together, and that they are centred around different materials and occur in different spaces keeps them apart. Further, Sandor's words draw attention to the idea of *Palo* as secretive and closed off to outsiders, underlining this as a difference from *Espiritismo Cruzado* as open and thus feminine. The activity of the *cajón*, like *prendas* were described to me as concrete examples of *Espiritismo Cruzado* and *Palo*'s syncretisation. The way different practices (*cajones*) or composite objects (*prendas*) come together destabilises *Espiritismo Cruzado/Palo* boundaries, but practitioners' differentiation also demonstrates how fluid and productive openness can still entail limits.

[83] As mentioned in chapter one, 'before' is an ambiguous time-space that often came up in conversations with Cubans with the referent constantly changing.

I suggested that despite the distinctions Sandor pointed out, both religious practices create the conditions for *muertos* to come and do necessary work. He seemed unconvinced but conceded that I had comprehended the above correctly, that indeed a *cajón* makes it possible for spirits to materialise in particular ways regardless of which religious tradition it pertains to. 'Yes, that is correct, but still,' he reminded me, 'it is true, *nganguleros* might pass other *nganguleros*, that happens, yes. But only *Congos*! A *ngangulero* will not pass other *muertos*—you will not have *gitanas*, *monjas* (nuns) or *árabes*. It is not like *Espiritismo Cruzado*, so mixed. *Palo* is purer. Of course, everything was mixed with the enslaved Africans, but we do not incorporate so many Catholic things. In this way *Espiritismo [Cruzado]* is a more *criolla* religion.'

In discussing both practices as working with *muertos*, what Sandor was saying might cause lines between *Espiritismo Cruzado* and *Palo* to deteriorate. In fact, 'Working with *muertos'* was what I originally understood to be the definition of *Espiritismo Cruzado*. Yet Sandor also emphatically highlighted the different categories of *muertos*, re-emphasising the practices' distinctions. Unlike *cuadro espirituales* as an eclectic mix of diverse *muertos*, *paleros* work only with *Congos*. 'Only *Negros Africanos,*' Sandor said, 'our ancestors.' Sandor explained this passing of the *Congo* happens when a person initiates into *Palo* and receives *rayamientos* (the relevant ritual cuttings). Trance is prompted, then, again by blood, not water.

Further, above, Sandor reiterated *Espiritismo Cruzado* as more mixed and *criolla*. Here he underscores the relevance of Blackness and Black Africans to *Palo* practice. There is an interesting disavowal of historical mixture in Sandor's framing of which *muertos* are his ancestors. However, his renunciation relates to some of the limits of mixture in creole-ness, especially as it excludes particular people. As mixture is denied to particular people in phenotype (dark-skinned Black versus the ideal of *Mulato/Mulata* as exemplars of mixedness), so too is it being denied by

Sandor in his religiosity. This indexes how belonging—or rather not belonging—can coincide within the rhetorics of *ser criollo*. I in part make this connection because Sandor was an interlocutor who had strong opinions on his racial subjectivity and Cuban racial consciousness. As he utilises and invokes narratives of mixedness and *ser criollo* (albeit in contrast to himself and his own religiosity) he complicates categories that purportedly signify Cubanness writ large.

For Sandor, as I learned was the case for other *paleros*, it seemed that the feminising of trance or being in a space dedicate to activities of *Espiritismo Cruzado* (another feminisation which appeared to still apply) could be cushioned through *Palo*. Though Arlo was at an *Espiritismo Cruzado cajón*, and he passed a *muerto*, he was not practicing *Espiritismo Cruzado*. Arlo's primary religious engagement as a *palero* provided a seemingly double-edged protection. Arlo was able to relate to his religiosity in this way due to *Palo*'s proximity to *Espiritismo Cruzado* but also due to its distance.

Muertos underpin all practices pertinent to *la religión*. Their status as the foundation of religiosity was a consensus among all the *religiosos* I know. Practitioners of *Palo* acknowledge that often times *Palo* and *Espiritismo Cruzado* communicate via the same modes of communication. Again, continuities like this point to a queer and *criolla* relationship between the two religious traditions as they are 'fundamentally complex, pluralistic and integrationist' (Fernández Olmos and Parvisini-Gerbert 2011:4), demonstrating a dynamism and emphasis on fluidity. At the same time, practitioners underline important distinctions. The divergences Sandor demonstrated above, for example, work with *fundamentos* or *bóvedas,* boldly distinguishes the two practices, something both *paleros* and *espiritistas* cite proudly when they mean to distance themselves from the other. And yet, as I mentioned, there are constant and consistent disruptions to these distinctions, as evidenced in objects such as *prendas espirituales*.

While chapter two introduced a discussion of the different religious traditions that make up *la religión*, here the relationship between *Espiritismo Cruzado* and *Palo* as practices has been further interrogated. Dynamics between *Espiritismo Cruzado* and *Palo* indicate that religious identity is relational. This coming together of the two creates a space for different possibilities in participation and potentialities that blur taken for granted norms of gender, sexuality, and the lines between religious traditions. Falling into trance or *Espiritismo Cruzado*'s feminine codings are not relinquished, but for men like Arlo, being a *palero* first and foremost is a safeguard against such femininity. In instances like these, particularly racialised and gendered associations of other religious traditions, practitioner, and category of spirit all come together to imply a tempering or buffering of *Espiritismo Cruzado's* feminising influence. In this way, this chapter has flipped the script and looked at when and how trance can masculinise. Both queerness and creoleness can be two starting points for engaging these fluid and contradictory navigations. In turning to them I have also attempted to draw attention to the way they can serve as parallel analytics.

Conclusion

A variety of factors play into how differently situated practitioners are gendered. I have suggested that in the case of Arlo, in passing his *Congo*, Buru, his actions are in practical terms outside of '"correct" masculine behaviors in Cuba' (Allen 2011:6). However, despite not falling in line with 'rhetorics and practices of Cuban masculine sexualities' (ibid), because of how both he and his *muerto* are coded in relation to their racial and, linked but separate, religious identities, Arlo appears to be unscathed. Despite *Espiritismo Cruzado,* and trance in particular, being so closely associated with women, 'black congo masculinities' (Beliso-De Jesús 2015b:142) afford men entry points into the practice and, within the practice, certain technologies of communication with spirits that are

considered feminine and feminising. As Griffith and Savage have noted, 'the gendering of bodily experience takes fascinating forms that are not always easily mapped on ordinary definitions of male and female, masculine and feminine' (2006: xix). In observing the practice of different combinations of religious traditions pertinent to *la religión,* I noted the relationship between racializing and gendering as follows: while racializing as *Mulato* (or 'light') corresponds to feminising (as seen in chapters two and six), racializing as Black corresponds to masculinising.

However, as Valentine demonstrates, 'age, race, class, and so on don't merely inflect or intersect with those experiences we call gender or sexuality, but rather shift the very boundaries of what "gender" and "sexuality" can mean in particular contexts' (2007:100). While trance is coded as eminently feminine, its meanings are shifted when the methodology is employed between two *nganguleros* (one *Congo* spirit, one live practitioner). I suggest this shifting is made possible because spiritual actors (again, in this case both living and dead) carry the weight of historically situated identities that complicate what is at stake and muddle norms providing entry points to approach religiosity differently. In other words, what is demonstrated is perhaps what has been suggested as Cuba's situated, 'fluidly coherent identities out of fragmented histories' (Coronil 1995: xiv). I have intimated that the creoleness that is emblematic of Cuba and *la religión* can, in some ways, parallel queerness.

Both entail a space for change, instability, and inbetweeness as 'ongoing ever-changing process[es]' (Fernández Olmos and Parvisini-Gerbert 2011:4). Both serve as sites of contention and contestation. This parallel is predicated on how mixing is not only creative and generative, it can also obscure and exclude. Likewise, queerness is not always antinormative, at times rather than being (solely) transgressive, it can end up reinforcing reductive regimes, norms and dichotomies (Weiss 2016; Cohen 1997).

Méndez has also examined the way that ritual practices can reinforce 'heterosexist and gendered normativities' (2014:103; Beliso-De Jesús 2009; Rubiera Castillo 2011) and that alongside this there are 'ingredients that stand in tension with "heteronormative" and "gendered" arrangements of bodies and power' (Méndez 2014:103). She has suggested that this partially contributes to a 'non-gendered logic' of *la religión* (Méndez 2014*)*. To me, however, I interpret ethnographic examples like Arlo's experience as demonstrating the importance of gender, its simultaneous porosity and fixity. Méndez goes on to voice a concern that I share:

> Part of my concern is that potentially liberatory efforts to identify spaces for "gender-crossing," "queer" inhabitants of the body, and even spaces for women's empowerment, have centred and further entrenched notions of a fixed dimorphically sexed human body along with the "universal" meanings of "sexual difference," at the expense of being able to fully recognize fluidity, multiplicity, and plurality at work within these ritual practices (2014:110).

Again, I share the concern of reproducing the abovementioned norms, but I did see them in play ethnographically. And further, I assert *la religión* might not have to mean that the latter (fluidity, multiplicity, plurality) has to be at the expense of the former (reproduction of norms). Lived experience shows they happen simultaneously—they are *Cruzado*. The realities of practicing *la religión* means a relationship to constant ambiguity**.** While there is tremendous mixing and openness, as seen in the *criolla* makeup or queer comingling of religious tradition in *la religión*, this same mixing and openness can sometimes mean limitations, exclusions and reductions.

Conclusion

The drumming and singing began loud and strong in the usual call and response format. Our bodily movements synced as we danced. I moved in rhythm with the others while also within my own cloud of tobacco smoke. I noticed I was not the only one who had worked up a sweat. One woman sprayed us with *aguardiente*, water from the *palangana,* and cologne. The cologne's sweet odour lingered in the air for a moment but dissipated quickly. We passed around a *jícara* of *aguardiente* and sang.

Dios me dio un poder.	God gave me a power.
Dios me dio un poder.	God gave me a power.
Dios me dio un poder.	God gave me a power.
Dios me dio un poder.	God gave me a power.

Eventually, through these collective efforts, Gema fell into trance. Falling into trance is both a long process of drumming, dancing, smoking, drinking, singing and also an abrupt occurrence that instantaneously takes hold of a person. An *espiritista* carefully took the jaw clip out of Gema's hair and removed her flip flops. The spirit soon introduced herself as Regla María. She was breathing heavily, as is common for many *muertos* when they first materialise. She searched for something. After finding a bottle, she took a long swig of *aguardiente* and sprayed the crowd. She began to cleanse us.

One by one, Regla María made her way through the group giving advice to *espiritistas*. She took my hand. Her right hand clutched mine as she brought us both to the ground. When we rose, we touched opposite shoulder to opposite shoulder, first right then left. She released me from her grip and moved on. She began to use water from the *palangana* to *despojar* the *cajones* and rested a *jícara* that was in her hand on one of the drummer's head. While this made me chuckle to myself, Regla María remained serious. All of her actions were deliberate and exaggerated. When she walked, she stomped.

Later, during her presentation, Regla María made her way back to me. She directed me to put out seven flowers for her on my *bóveda*. She wanted *mar pacíficos* (hibiscuses) and a candle. She said she blessed me and when I asked things of my spirits, I could ask things of her as well. Regla María said she would watch over me. Then she began to tease me, albeit with a stern sentiment. She told me when I worked with spirits, my notebook, although nice (this compliment was said mockingly), could not be black, it needed to be brown (a colour often related to *Oyá*, the feminine warrior *oricha* associated with *muertos).* She told me, like others before her, that I was not there just because of my intellectual interests or by chance. I was there because my *muertos* brought me.

She knew that my departure was fast approaching. Speaking in *bozal,* she said, '*Tú crees que no vas a regresar porque no vas a tener, ¿o estoy borrachia?'* ('You think you will not come back because you will not have [the money]. Or am I drunk [wrong]?') I looked at her without answering. She demanded a response, repeating: 'Or am I drunk?' She asked again whether or not she was right.

I replied, '*luz*.'

She would help me with this. When I went back to my country, I would have problems, yes, but nothing too serious. I would return to Cuba. She slapped her chest with an open palm and told me, *'Aunque tú no crees, mi India, India, India, pero yo sí sé porque soy Africana, Africana, Africana*. ('Although you do not think you will my India, India, India, but I know because I am African, African, African.') *'Te voy a dar un regalito.'* ('I will give you a present.') She took a *mar pacífico* from the vase on the *bóveda* and handed it to me. She began to instruct me on what I needed to do when I got back to 'my land.' She noted my face and asked if I was not returning to where I came from.

I did not know how to answer. I was leaving Cuba, but I did not know which land was 'mine.' I looked at her puzzled and was unsure as to how I should explain things. Regla María became impatient with me. She said, again, more aggressively, '¡¿*O estoy borrachia?! ¿¡O estoy borracchia?!*' ('Or am I drunk?! Or am I drunk?!') Gema's sister, Diana, intervened on my behalf explaining I was a funny case. She said that I was almost as *criolla* (mixed), in my own way, as Cubans. My roots are from one place, I was raised in another, and I live in a third. When Regla María understood, she paused, then declared that she saw no problem.

She resumed explaining the concrete actions I should take so that I could *inventar* enough money to return back to Cuba. '*Entoncia*…' ('So…') she began to tell me what I needed to do with the flower she gave me. I would need to dry it in the sun and then grind it into a powder. Then, she explained, I should divide the powder into three parts. I was to place the powder in three different little paper packets that I would have to make. Then when I arrived, I needed to subtly drop the packet. I needed to do this in India and the UK, and also when I eventually visited the United States again. She told me it did not matter that my situation was complicated. I could still do as she said.

I assured her, '*No, no tienes toda la razón, noble ser.*' ('No, you are completely right noble being.')
Regla María told me, '¡*Tú regresias, y cuando regresias tú vas a ser más bruja que nadie!'* ('You are going to return, and when you return you will be more of a witch than anyone!') She, all the *espiritistas* surrounding us, and I all laughed together knowing this to be false.

In this ethnographic encounter, a group of women are practicing *Espiritismo Cruzado.* As the song from the vignette suggests, *espiritistas* are able to practice *Espiritismo Cruzado*, or 'work with *muertos*' because they are endowed with a power, a *don*, a capacity for this work. We worked together to communicate with spirits and produce embodied

knowledge. This collaborative, embodied knowledge is predicated on feeling: in the case of this *cajón*, a particularly sensorial feeling rooted in a communally cultivated environment.

Our bodies serve as tools for spirits' communications. The body as a shared tool for communication is, of course, evident in Gema's falling into trance. However, engaging the body in specific ways is also relevant to the actions that allow for trance and the interactions that occur during a *muerto*'s presentation. These enactments of knowledge production, especially because of their collaborative and embodied nature, serve as a kind of mothering.

Mothering is done by *espiritistas* and *muertos* alike. In micro-actions, like simply taking Gema's jaw clip and flip flops off, an *espiritista* ensures that Gema and her *muerta* will be comfortable. Diana helped me along when I did not know how to appropriately articulate my situation to Regla María. In addition to these specific examples, more generally, following Lorde's definition of mothering (2007[1984]: 173-174), this process is evident through *muertos* and their *caridades* because they endow practitioners with power through the capacity for action.

Through their spiritual abilities, *espiritistas* are able to both get by and support one another. Though the scales vary, all of these engagements can be framed as acts of mothering**.** Lorde suggests that mothering means knowing through the use of the power relative to our lived experiences. Through this knowledge we can effectually change our realities. Following this understanding of mothering, in their constant negotiation of power through knowledge production, spirits and *espiritistas* are mothering (ibid).

The ethnographic example above focuses on a problem I had. Mothering entails using power to serve practical purposes, in this case, so that I might return to Cuba. I had to lay to rest my doubts, indeed perceived by

my interlocutors as a combination of symptoms of timidity, weakness and damage and a relative innocence to the reality of *muertos*. I had, after all, only been spiritually developing for 15 months at the time of this interaction, rather than a lifetime. While my desire to return to Cuba had lower stakes than the hustle that *espiritistas* and *muertos* negotiate day-to-day, this example showcases the way *Espiritismo Cruzado* is practiced through processes of mothering as concrete advice for problem solving. And, indeed, Regla María's *caridad* paid off. Since this encounter between Regla María and myself I had the opportunity to return to Cuba twice. My interlocutors and friends were unsurprised. My return visits were the concrete proof of *muertos*.

Spirits' authority is linked to their ability to know what the living cannot and to help ensure that we can actualise our *caminos*. In referring to herself as '*Africana, Africana, Africana*,' Regla María is elaborating on this point. When I spoke to another *espiritista* about Regla María emphasising her Africanness, the woman only offered the following explanation: 'She knows, spirits know. Your doubts need to be put to rest, because she knows.'

The *espiritista* confirmed my thoughts. It seemed that Regla María was playfully highlighting the degree of her spiritual potency and knowledge in relation to her Africanness. Practitioners and *muertos* are always in processes of re-interpolating reductive racial imaginaries and imbuing them with new meaning. Here, the idea of Africanness as inherently more capable or authentic allows for the framework of *Congo Africanos* to be coded as especially spiritual and knowledgeable. In referring to me as a '*bruja,'* problematic Cuban racial imaginaries of *la religión,* as laid out in chapters one and two, are reinterpreted and even joked about.

While this example concerns an interaction between me and a *Conga* spirit, throughout the thesis I have highlighted other archetypical categories of *muertos*: proud and resistant *Indios*, spiritual and venerable

Chinos, and maybe most notably, flirtatious and feminine *gitanas*. The diverse categories of spirits relevant to *Espiritismo Cruzado* not only reflect the trajectory of Cuban history, they are indicative of the practice's predication on entanglements. Overall the above vignette illustrates this central theme of creative mixture.

I explored how creative mixture is relevant to *Espiritismo Cruzado* through ambiguity, sharing, fluidity, collaboration, community, connections and disconnections. One of the most obvious examples of such ambiguity and fluidity is seen in trance. I showed that *Espiritismo Cruzado* practice blurs the distinction between spirit and practitioner. Trance, perhaps most pointedly, problematises questions of boundaries when *muertos* and *espiritistas* come together and share bodies. Yet, there are other less apparent indicators that gesture to sharing, ambiguity and fluidity as well. Different religious traditions come together in *Espiritismo Cruzado*. Above, the vignette's protagonist Regla María is a *Conga* spirit and therefore implicitly a *palera*. She indirectly refers to the *oricha* Oyá in her advice that I use a brown notebook, highlighting the way *Santo* references are enmeshed in practice.

As in the harmonious convergences of religious traditions in the ethnographic example, my interlocutors generally considered mixture to be endemic to the Cuban people and their religiosity. Diana's comment, that I was almost as '*criolla'* as Cubans, showcases '*ser criollo*' as a factor in Cubans' sense of self. *Espiritismo Cruzado*, a distinctly Cuban religious tradition, is arguably —as Sandor from chapter seven stated—the most '*criolla'* practice of *la religión* as it combines and incorporates components from several different practices in *la religión*. This sense of being *criolla*, in flux, ambiguous, and fluid relates to contextual ideas and experiences of race and gender.

This thesis aimed to explore how gendering and racializing are dynamically co-constituted and, as I learned, crucial to comprehending

Espiritismo Cruzado practice. I have attempted to interrogate practitioners' interests and insecurities surrounding how the aforementioned processes of gendering and racializing map onto practices, spirits, and the experiences of *religiosos* themselves. This thesis has shown that practicing *la religión*, *Espiritismo Cruzado* specifically, is variable and complex and inextricable from day to day life which, for my interlocutors, is centred around getting by through innovative and creative negotiations of *luchar, inventar*, and *resolver*. Likewise, in shedding light on how *Espiritismo Cruzado* is in dialogue with the everyday hustle, I further endeavoured to take seriously my interlocutors' concerns.

The thesis' introduction posed the following questions: Why is there an apparent conflation between *espiritistas* and women, and relatedly between women and mothers? How do Cuban concepts of race and gender shape such conflations? And finally, how do these conceptions and conflations relate to practitioners' everyday lives? I have addressed the first question regarding the conflation between *espiritista* and women through ideas of naturalness in knowledge production and rhetorics of openness that are relevant to *Espiritismo Cruzado.*

As I detailed at various points of the thesis, falling into trance is not unique to *Espiritismo Cruzado*; it is an important component of other religious traditions in the matrix as well. Yet many *religiosos* characterise *Espiritismo Cruzado* through the particular technology of trance. I have suggested that trance's necessary utilisation of an open, penetrated, and shared body parallels processes of sex and reproduction, and that this configuration of the body contributes to the feminising of *Espiritismo Cruzado*. Beyond trance, other methodologies of communicating with spirits and knowledge production can be considered more 'natural' or 'innate' as well.

Practitioners spoke about *caridades* via intuition and sensitivity as particularly 'elemental' and 'authentic.' I have argued that alongside the majority of *espiritistas* being women, a combination of practice being predicated on an innate, natural gift and modes of knowledge production contributes to *Espiritismo Cruzado*'s gendering as feminine. Similar notions of naturalness and openness found in *Espiritismo Cruzado*, I contend, contribute to the related wider conflation of women as mothers. Further, this conflation was evident in several ethnographic interactions I had. I observed women value and emphasise their roles as mothers and describe these roles as characteristic of their womanhood. My Cuban mother's words from chapter three explicitly articulate that 'being a mother is a woman's greatest joy.'

This thesis also set out to interrogate how Cuban concepts of race and gender shape the above conflations. I have explored race and gender via codings of *Espiritismo Cruzado*, and inevitably other practices of *la religión* as religious traditions always find themselves in conversation with one another. The openness of *Espiritismo Cruzado* is also conceptualised through its mixture of different components of religious traditions relevant to the matrix. As I showed in chapter one, in the Cuban context mixture inevitably gestures back to questions of race.

In the thesis I have examined how racial identities are gendered according to their proximity to Whiteness (*Mulata* as feminine, Black as masculine). The complex entanglements that gender racial identities are seen in archetypical categories of spirits. These codings generally coincide with spirits' affectations, but as demonstrated in chapter seven, this synchronisation is not always the case. Even when these codings are not performed appropriately, their weight in the wider Cuban cultural imaginary at times seems to be strong enough to sustain them.

Practice of *Espiritismo Cruzado* is rife with what appears to be incongruities. As seen in Black women having White noses (chapter six),

or men being mounted by men bolstering hyper-heteromasculinity (chapter seven), seeming contradictions have been intimated throughout the thesis. *Espiritismo Cruzado* is understood as 'lighter' and more 'mixed.' Yet *Espiritismo Cruzado* is also framed as more authentic and natural, qualities people I worked with relate not only to femininity, but also to Blackness.

These apparent contradictions support my wider observations that the Cubans I know are heavily invested in gendered and racialized codings, but also that these codings are constantly in flux. *Espiritismo Cruzado* is a religious tradition in which apparent incongruities come together. While they do come together, I have shown that this coming together is not always straightforward or harmonious. Nevertheless, *Espiritismo Cruzado* practice does not necessarily rest on contradictory racialised or gendered codings, instead the nature of practice affords cohesive but complicated convergences.

I observed the conflations of *espiritista*-as-woman, woman-as-mother as conceptualisations that often map onto the day to day hustle of getting by. What it means to be a woman and a mother is centred around notions of independence, resilience, and flexibility. In particular, these virtues are also characteristic of *la religión* and *Espiritismo Cruzado*. I illustrated how *Espiritismo Cruzado* provides opportunities for *espiritistas* to witness and validate one another. This witnessing and validation is achieved through *muertos'* authoritative advice. Fellow practitioners and spirits form a foundation of support. This support makes up part of the mothering I have shown is at play in *Espiritismo Cruzado* practice. Mothering, I argued (both in raising children and practicing *Espiritismo Cruzado*), is done by a network. I have also illuminated how *Espiritismo Cruzado*, insofar as it contributes to *resolver* and *inventar*, allows women to mother in particular ways. That is, it grants a sense of ease and helps women hustle and provide.

A project about women-as-mothers or mothers-as-hustlers could have resulted in a rich thesis in its own right. Yet, that would effectively ignore how my interlocutors felt they came to be able to hustle and provide in the first place: through *muertos*. I had a privileged vantage point for studying *Espiritismo Cruzado* as my interlocutors identified me as having the spiritual capacity for practice. As such, spiritual development was part of my methodology. While *Espiritismo Cruzado* is open to all, my active, experiential engagement with the practice was deemed necessary for my *camino*. Without the *don* and rich, intimate relationships with *muertos*, my entry point to *Espiritismo Cruzado* would have been drastically different.

This thesis could not have provided its findings without taking *muertos* seriously as they significantly impact everyday life. Including *muertos* as interlocutors afforded this project unique insights into race and gender as they manifest in the lived experiences of the Cubans I worked with. Spirits speak to long trajectories of interconnected gendering and racializing that are particular to the Cuban context. Further, they impact the gendered and racialised identities of practitioners.

Additionally, despite primarily focusing on *Espiritismo Cruzado*, exploring *la religión* as a matrix is necessary to understanding the complexity of practice. Especially for the kind of religiosity relevant to Cubans, locating *Espiritismo Cruzado* within a wider milieu is essential as it finds itself defined in relation to other religious traditions. In this thesis I have argued that *Espiritismo Cruzado* is about creativity and mixing. I elucidated this through exploring questions of mothers, reproduction, and mothering; the connection between mothers and the ability to make do in precarity; and the idea of feeling-as-knowing.

My interlocutors, as women, emphasised their roles as mothers just as much as their identities as *espiritistas*. In particular, they highlighted the necessary, imaginative work of *resolviendo* as crucial to motherhood.

Taking this point seriously allows for the thesis to present Black and *Mulata* women as intrinsically valuable on their own terms. As practitioners, they have privileged communications with *muertos*. As mothers, they underpin societal maintenance, provide for children, and are resourceful and savvy. The thesis' title, '*Espiritista*-as-Woman, Woman-as-Mother,' is not just because of the practice's popular gendered codings. These roles are meaningful for my interlocutors.

Mothering, like *Espiritismo Cruzado*, is difficult, it necessarily includes nurturing and toughening up. In this context, mothering is about knowing that through the use of spiritual capacity, *espiritistas* can effectually confront lived realities. Especially evident in chapter four's arguments, *Espiritismo Cruzado* practice does not change material circumstances, but it provides tools and support for navigating them. While I have argued for practice as mothering in Lorde's sense of the word (2007[1984]: 173-174), I have equally aimed to illustrate the links and parallels between *Espiritismo Cruzado* and the practicalities of mothering.

In chapter one I discussed how Black women's bodies created the Cuban nation and allowed for a contemporary emphasis on *mulatez* to be possible. I also introduced the concept of *mambisas*, or guerrilla warriors and mothers, who exemplify motherhood as indicative of strength and toughness rather than subordination or modesty. Because many of the *caridades muertos* provide concern practical advice about getting by, as seen in chapter four, I have intimated that *Espiritismo Cruzado* helps mothers hustle.

At different points in the thesis, the reader may have noticed that many of the crucial conversations I had were with men, even if we were discussing women. Recall some of the project's foundational comments: Women 'are better at *Espiritismo [Cruzado],*' 'they are *for* these things, because of their capacity to give birth,' or '80% of *Palo* is *Espiritismo Cruzado*.' Most

of the active work with *muertos* that I did, however, was with women. This gendered division, to me, is no coincidence. Women-as-mothers are hustlers. On one occasion, Ines and I discussed the idea that women practice *Espiritismo* more than men. We mulled over the various explanations: that women have a better capacity for mediumship because they are accustomed to sharing their bodies. Or, perhaps it was because men did not want to be associated with homosexuality, due to the practice's feminine codings. Smiling to herself, Ines offered another suggestion, maybe men practiced *Espiritismo* in fewer numbers because, 'they are busy bullshitting and women have to *resolver* for the household.'

I observed that men had the luxury of long conversations and musings about what religiosity means. Women, on the other hand, simply had to get on with things**.** That women were too busy to chat that instead they were actively *luchando*, speaks to the language used to describe *Espiritismo* practice: *working* with *muertos*. Jafari Allen rightly states that 'we cannot understand the dimensions and dynamism of the social character of human beings without thinking of gender, sexuality, race, class, and nation as they are lived—simultaneously' (2016: 618).

Espiritismo Cruzado, I have argued, brings these complex components of lived experience together. In this thesis I have drawn attention to *espiritistas* as both strong and complex agential actors making do day-to-day. The *espiritistas* I worked with also recognised their strength, but they ascribed it to the creativity and innovation that *muertos* make possible. I return to Odalis and her family to conclude this thesis because they guided my understanding of *Espiritismo Cruzado* and mothered me through its practice.

On one of my return visits to Cuba, during a typical weekend *escuelita*, Ines fell into trance with her *Africana*. This Francisca said to me, 'Good girl, you have gone back to your land, but you have not forgotten us

Negros. You keep your *bóveda*, you mix your religion with ours and, like this, you will continue to move forward, step by step.' Odalis responded to Francisca for me, saying 'with your blessings *noble ser*, thanks to the strength and light you give, we can *seguir luchando* [continue in the hustle].' María, who was always keen to participate, began to sing. The rest of the family, Odalis, Claudia, Ines and I, joined in:

Vamos a vencer, vencer.	We will overcome, overcome.
Vamos a vencer la dificultad.	We will overcome hardship.
Vamos a vencer, vencer.	We will overcome, overcome.
Vamos a vencer la dificultad.	We will overcome hardship.

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